Studies in Education and Psychology 22

Sven G. Hartman

CHILDREN'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Stockholm Institute of Education
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CHILDREN'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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Abstract

This thesis summarises a series of investigations of the interests and thoughts of children aged 5 to 13 years. The first studies were carried out in connection with religious education in Swedish schools. For this reason, the Background section outlines the development of religious education in our schools.

The central problem in the child studies is **what** children think, not how their thinking takes place. It is the content of children's thoughts that are the focus, not the form. The investigation material consists of questionnaires, sentence-completion items, essays and interviews. Children's texts and interview answers have undergone quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

The concepts "existential question" and "personal world view" are discussed, and afford the theoretical framework for analysis of content and interpretation of the results.

The results show that existential questions arise spontaneously in small children and are common during later childhood. Most common are questions about loneliness, fear and social relationships. Older children ask many questions about war, death, conflicts among friends, bullying, guilt, sport and injustices between rich and poor countries. Comparisons of age groups show how the perspective widens with age and how girls seem to have the lead over boys regarding maturity. Content analysis also shows how children endeavour to place their questions in a larger context, developing a personal world view that corresponds to the existential questions they formulate. There can be observed in many children an interplay between existential questions and "answers" in the form of a personal world view.

It has been possible to demonstrate in such a world view fragments of conceptions of society, of man and of God. The results thus show that it is meaningful to expect in children, and to study, a philosophy of life.

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Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my favourite opponent, Ros Mari Hartman, Fil Kand, my wife and life´s companion.

Linköping, April 1986

Sven G. Hartman

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings develop and grow old. This is something people have always pondered over, noting the differences in quality of life and character that exist between different ages. Shakespeare counted seven ages from the cradle to the grave. The age with which we are concerned here is that of

> "...the whining schoolboy with his satchel
> And shining morning face, creeping like snail
> Unwillingly to school."
> As You Like It, II,vii

The child and the school - the encounter between them has often brought to the fore problems that have then become the object of scientific studies. This is also the background to the child studies presented here. They were originally started in connection with pedagogical research and development work aimed at overcoming difficulties in the teaching of religion in Swedish schools (1).

This context has influenced the direction of my child studies in many respects. While they have touched upon a number of problems of developmental psychology, the focus has all the time been pedagogical. As a result, my studies have moved into the country where theology, religious education and developmental psychology meet, arriving somewhere near the outer limits of what has been most topical within child psychology.

Basically, my studies concern children´s philosophy of life. This may hardly be said to be a well-delimited research area: rather, a whole panorama diffuse at the edges. The security of a researcher working within a well-defined area has been absent. As recompense, exciting new problem areas have opened up.

I have been interested in <u>what</u> children think and less in <u>how</u> they think. I am thus more concerned with studying children´s thoughts than with studying their thought processes. A central question has been "What do children think about?" I have also tried to elucidate

the direction children´s thoughts take, and what they use their thoughts for: in other words, how they develop a personal world view.

My studies are based on seven investigations of children aged from 5-13 years. The first investigation was carried out in 1969 and the latest was completed more than ten years later.

Before summarising the results of these studies, I introduce the studies by presenting the pedagogical context influencing their design. I also present the central concepts to be used in the analysis of the investigation material. The report is concluded with a brief account of how my results relate to other research in this area and in neighbouring fields.

BACKGROUND

My investigation was started at the end of the sixties. It concerned pupil interest in middle-school religious instruction.

The origin of the project in which these studies were included can hardly be viewed independently of the educational policy situation of the sixties. I believe that the direction our studies have taken has largely been determined by specifically Swedish conditions. I was scarcely aware of this at the time, but it is quite clearly noticeable now when returning to the investigation material.

The sixties in Sweden were filled with important school reforms following the commissions, trial activity and intensive school debate of the fifties. In the old Swedish parallel system the school for learning and the system of popular education had functioned largely independently of each other since the 17th century, as regards both administration and teaching content. Through the 1962 Swedish comprehensive school reform, the two quite separate school traditions were for the first time combined into a common school form.

It was not surprising that the school debate was so heated during the fifties and sixties. With a broad political majority behind the reform decisions and a stable domestic political situation with a social democratic majority of more than 40 years´ duration, the thoroughgoing school reform was carried through with great firmness and consistency. The reform that converted the Swedish parallel system into a uniform school was characterised by markedly centralised administrative control.

Considering the great changes the reform entailed, it may be thought odd that such a large part of the school debate of the sixties was devoted to religious instruction in schools. But the fact is that this has been a feature of Swedish educational debate and educational policy during the whole of this century. Education-

al history in fact justifies elevating the following principle to a general law for Swedish educational circumstances: each new educational enquiry is followed by at least one royal petition or a collection of signatures from uneasy Christian groups. Thus, indefatigably, people have risen to defend the status of Christianity as a school subject (2). It may possibly be that the reason for this is that Swedish educational history coincides so largely with that of religious instruction.

Swedish popular education has a strange history with roots in the reformation movement of the 16th century. Part of the Lutheran heritage was a programme of education based on parents´ responsibility for teaching children and servants, and on the clergy´s responsibility for checking and recording the knowledge of all their parishioners in two respects: reading ability and religious knowledge. It is possible that the first was partly a condition for the second, since the Reformation, in its Swedish form, made Christianity a religion for readers.

General compulsory school attendance was not introduced in Sweden until 1842. It had thus been preceded by a long period of popular education based on the principle of the household teaching obligation. Early Swedish popular education was remarkable partly in that it was so well documented in the parish records that we can still form a living picture of how the teaching functioned (3).

As far as may be judged, the majority of the population were able to read as early as the 17th and 18th centuries. People could read, they knew the Catechism, but they could not write. The "three R´s" were thus two at that early stage of Swedish popular education: religion and reading.

This seems to have been based on two sets of circumstances. Firstly, the country bore the stamp of a uniform Lutheran culture. It was assumed that all citizens would share the evangelical Lutheran faith. This view can be traced back to Martin Luther himself. One need only quote the following lines from the preface to his Little Catechism to understand this point:

> But to those who will not learn this shall it be said that they deny Christ and are no Christians. They shall neither be admitted to holy communion nor be allowed to be godfathers nor to enjoy Christian freedom; but shall be delivered unto the pope and his officers, yea unto the Devil himself. Likewise shall parents and masters refuse them food and drink, and shall say to them that the prince would wish to drive such unmannerly persons from the country et cetera.
>
> For notwithstanding that no man may or shall force another to faith, yet shall people be brought to knowledge of what is right and wrong for those they desire to dwell among and gain their livelihood. For whoever desires to live in a city shall know and keep that city´s laws, under which he wishes to live: the same whether he believes in them or is a rascal and a rogue.
>
> (4)

A second set of circumstances encouraging early popular education was a centralised system for the dissemination and control of the educational programme. This centralism may be said to have characterised the Swedish public admininstration ever since the Reformation. It received very clear expression in the 1686 Public Worship Regulation Act, which laid down the form of the system of instruction and supervision. The supervision included annual examination of both young and old. The results were entered in the parish registers using a differentiated grading scale. The measures of central control were further intensified during the 18th century through a series of ecclesiastical and secular provisions (5). It may be wondered whether these measures of increased control on the part of the central powers presaged the incipient dissolution of the uniform culture.

When the agrarian, Lutheran-tinted, uniform culture began to break up in earnest during the 19th century as a result of the great structural changes within the economy, settlement patterns and population, a new educational programme was also introduced. The new programme of 1842 was based on compulsory school attendance instead of compulsory teaching. The two R´s were increased to four: religion, reading, writing and arithmetic. The new school atmosphere has been summarised in the motto "God and Country" (6).

In the new educational system, as well, religion had a dominating

position. The Church was trustee of the elementary school, the vicar was the natural chairman of the school governors and, above all, Luther´s Little Catechism still dominated completely as teaching material in the everyday life of the school. At the turn of the century, curricula were so designed that, on completion of training, an elementary school teacher had studied, and been examined on, Luther´s Little Catechism no fewer than eight times: four at elementary school, once during confirmation studies, once in the preparatory course of study for training college and finally twice at training college. It should be noted that the training colleges of the time had adopted educational programmes on the Prussian pattern that were more appropriate to elementary-school children´s tasks than to what today would be deemed a teacher´s educational needs. The teacher´s task consisted primarily of reproducing in his pupils a centrally-defined measure of knowledge. For this, no further subject studies were needed.

In ecclesiastical quarters it was long considered that the first task of the school was to give a preparatory education before the fairly advanced theological schooling took over for confirmation studies. This was the situation well into the 20th century (7).

In the 1919 educational programme the intensive Catechism-swotting was indeed replaced by biblical history and study of "The Plain Teachings of Jesus". This now applied to the educational programme itself; but in practice Luther´s Little Catechism remained long in Swedish schools. The Lutheran element had been too powerful and the inertia of a compulsory school system is too great for such radical changes to take effect all at once. Yet Sweden during the early 1900´s was far from being a uniformly Lutheran culture. The Labour movement and the Free Church movement had already gone far in changing the ideological structure of the country.

At the time of the second World War, much of the old Lutheran profile had definitely been erased, but instruction in religion, or Christianity as the subject was called, was still carried on, even though it was no longer confessional in the sense of being bound to any one confession.

Both the Church of Sweden and the Swedish Free churches depended then, as now, on the school for their religious instruction. The instruction offered by most churches in Sweden may be seen as a confessional complement to the fundamental religious instruction schools are expected to give.

A great change came about with the introduction of the comprehensive school in 1962. The comprehensive school curriculum laid down that the instruction shall be about religion, not in religion. The instruction was made into an orientational subject. The syllabus itself was not markedly changed but, as opposed to this, the way of approaching the material was (see page 10). The change applied to all the comprehensive schools in the country.

This very brief exposé of part of Swedish educational history is included to elucidate some striking elements of the educational debate of the 1960´s, particularly the debate about religious instruction in schools. I believe these circumstances together create a pattern that may be specifically Swedish. I also believe that this pattern has, directly and indirectly, affected the premises for the investigations to be reported in the following chapters.

I consider that the following circumstances characterise the basis of the Swedish school, and particularly of religious instruction in Swedish schools:

- Popular education has very deep roots in a uniform Lutheran culture.

- The content of, and approach in, schools is uniform and marked by a centralistic tradition within the public administration.

- The Church and, latterly, other Christian groups as well, have by tradition expectations of the school and its work. The school is responsible for basic religious instruction.

- Society has been marked since the second World War by in-

creasing secularisation and pluralism.

To illustrate one peculiarity in the Swedish school, I shall isolate two dimensions of its historically determined conditions, namely the varying degree of central control and the change of our society from a monolithic culture to pluralism. Combining these two phenomena gives the figure below, which may tell us something of the Swedish school´s points of departure:

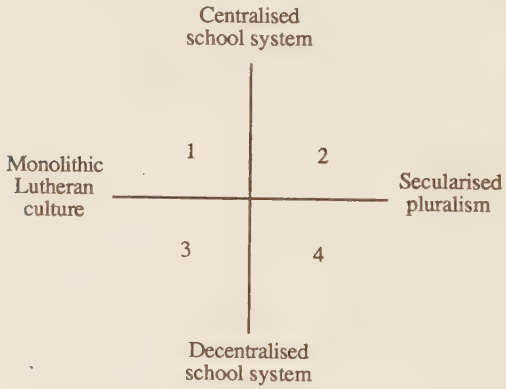

Figure 1.

The figure shows four different points of departure for school work. I consider there is little doubt that the Swedish position is represented by field no. 2. Swedish schools have since their inception and up to modern times been centrally controlled and uniform. During this century, secularisation and pluralism have increased.

This emerges more clearly if Sweden is compared with other Nordic countries. With a certain reservation, I would maintain that, despite the great cultural similarities between the Nordic countries, there are nevertheless significant differences in this particular respect. Finland´s historical background has given her an

administrative tradition that is at least as centralistic as Sweden´s, but secularisation and pluralism have not gone equally far. Finland can thus be put in the first field in the figure. Norway´s administrative tradition is not as centralistic as Sweden´s or Finland´s, nor does she have such strong secularisation and pluralism as Sweden; and can thus be placed in the third field. Lastly, in Denmark, secularisation and pluralism have advanced as far as in Sweden, but the Danes very early developed a decentralised school tradition which is very unlike the Swedish system (8).

With the reservation that my material for describing conditions in the other Nordic countries is insufficient, I would nevertheless maintain that the characteristics of the Swedish situation place her in field 2. in the figure. Sweden has developed from a monolithic, evangelical-Lutheran culture to a secularised and, compared to formerly, fairly pluralistic society, while retaining many of the centralistic features of her educational history.

This combination of circumstances invites difficulties, as becomes particularly obvious when one considers religious instruction in schools. Our historical development presents us with an almost insoluble problem: how to carry on compulsory religious instruction in a centralistic and uniform school system that has the job of serving a secularised and pluralistic society?

In the 1962 Comprehensive School reform, the following solution was tried: schools continued to give the same amount of religious instruction as before, using largely the same subject matter. Instruction was still compulsory, but now it was to be conducted in an objective manner. This was marked by changing the name of the school subject from "Christianity" to "Christian knowledge". This is how the teaching objectives were formulated in the curriculum:

> The purpose of instruction in Christian knowledge is to give pupils a general outline of the main contents of the biblical writings, of Christian faith and ethics, of the main features of Christian history and its different confessional forms; and of important non-Christian religions. It shall also impart a knowledge of the currents that questioned the value of religious truths; and give

> insight into present basic ethical and religious issues and currents of thought. The instruction shall be objective, in the sense that it imparts factual knowledge of the content and meaning of different religious outlooks, without seeking to influence the pupils authoritatively to embrace a particular view.
>
> (9)

This curriculum solution and its consequences were debated furiously. The debate on religious instruction in schools culminated in 1963 in a huge collection of signatures, with the formation of a new political party in its wake. This goes to show just how politically-loaded an issue the teaching of religion has been in Sweden.

As a solution to the apparently insoluble problem of compulsory religious instruction in a pluralistic society, the 1962 curriculum was not a success. Teachers were bewildered if not stunned by the demands of the curriculum: pupils received instruction that they evidently disliked. Various ideological groupings battled intensively on how the curriculum should be put into practice (10).

The 1969 curriculum offered an incentive for a new teaching solution to the problem. The teaching was still to be "objective", but the curriculum gave possibilities of basing religious instruction on pupils´ existential questions as well as directly on the subject matter. Parallel with the new curriculum an enquiry was published showing that Swedish teenagers were indeed taken up with existential questions.

Underlying this pupil-centred methodology was an assumption that different religions and ideological systems of belief shared common ground on a number of central existential questions. Studies of young peoples´ interests further showed that this type of issue was also of concern to pupils. By affording opportunities for placing pupils´ own questions at the centre and letting them seek possible solutions in different religions and ideologies - thus individualising the teaching, the problem of objectivity could to some extent be by-passed (11).

This is where my child studies come in. The new curriculum, together with the intensive debate on religious instruction in

schools, created a need for knowledge concerning children´s interests and the existential questions they ask. I consider this to be an important background to the present study.

Since the child studies were carried out, the Swedish comprehensive school has received yet another new curriculum. The 1980 Comprehensive School Curriculum reinforces the view that pupils´ existential questions form an appropriate starting point for the teaching. This now applies not only to religious instruction, however, but other subjects are also supposed to give existential questions a central place. Even some parts of science subjects are supposed to move outwards from pupils´ existential questions. This may possibly be taken as a sign that the dilemma of a centralistic school system combined with a pluralistic society is now casting its shadow over other subjects as well as religious instruction.

A historical parallel

The great changes in religious instruction in Swedish schools came about shortly after the two World Wars. At the same time, two waves of pedagogical debate swept over the country. Anyone who is interested in the history of teaching can find many interesting parallels between the pattern of development in Swedish school religious instruction and certain features of American pedagogical progressivism as developed by John Dewey at the turn of the century(12).

American progressivism holds firmly to the concept of a unified school in a pluralistic social situation. The idea of a common educational grounding for all was considered an important element in the development of a democratic society. It was important for all to have the same educational opportunities and, together in a general school, to receive a common education for citizenship. For these reasons, private schools and confessional schools were viewed askance. The need for a common educational grounding was particularly stressed in the USA, where massive immigration created acute difficulties in bringing together different cultures to form a single body of citizens. Surely this is part of the reason why

John Dewey can proclaim his creed:

> I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. ... I believe that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.
>
> (13)

What is perhaps less well known is that John Dewey himself took an active part in the American debate on religious instruction. The social objectives he envisaged for the work of schools led him to oppose very strongly the ideas that the general school system should offer confessional religious instruction, and that the confessional schools should increase in number:

> ... Our schools, in bringing together those of different nationalities, languages, traditions, and creeds, in assmimilating them together upon the basis of what is common and public in endeavor and achievement, are performing an infinitely significant religious work. They are promoting the social unity out of which in the end genuine religious unity must grow. Shall we interfere with this work? shall we run the risk of undoing it by introducing into education a subject which can be taught only by segregating pupils and turning them over at special hours to separate representatives of rival faiths? ... The American people is conscious that its schools serve best the cause of religion in serving the cause of social unification; and that under certain conditions schools are more religious in substance and in promise without any of the conventional badges and machinery of religious instruction than they could be in cultivating these forms at the expense of a state-consciousness.
>
> (14)

Although Swedish educational policymakers would certainly not dare to define the concept of religion so widely as Dewey did, it is probable that considerations of this kind played a part in the Swedish educational debate on religious instruction during the fifties and sixties.

School in general, and perhaps religious instruction in particular, was to afford social upbringing with the emphasis on common issues and interests (15). It was thought that general awareness included a kind of community of purpose that ought to find ex-

pression in schools´ activities. Here contemporary child psychology was also used. Dewey started, as did the earlier child psychology, with the assumption that every child repeats the development that mankind has undergone during the course of the millennia. This implies that every theme that spontaneously and seriously attracts children´s interests also reflects the work and ways of thought of an earlier cultural epoch. Thus there exists a thematic cycle that would be common to children´s spontaneous thoughts, and to cultural history in general.

There are here clear parallels with the view developing within Swedish religious education and curriculum design during the 70´s. Through studies of children and young adults, their interest in existential questions was mapped. These studies indicated a twofold community of problems. First, there were a series of existential themes that were common to the child groups and the young adult groups. Secondly, it was shown that these themes largely coincided with the questions that have been central to the great world views during the course of history.

The strong position of developmental psychology within progressivism is also discernible in the Swedish debate. Dewey stated:

> I believe that the question of method is ultimately reducible to the question of the order of development of the child´s powers and interests. The law for presenting and treating material is the law implicit within the child´s own nature. Because this is so I believe the following statements are of supreme importance as determining the spirit in which education is carried on. (16)

Dewey was therefore claiming that if only one had sufficient knowledge of the child´s development, the problems of method would solve themselves. This view of the role of research was typical. The disinclination found within pessimism to delve deeper into the evaluative and moral aspects of education has partly reappeared in the Swedish debate. It is symptomatic that the great changes of 1919 were not justified with ideological and educational policy arguments. I think here of the removal of Luther´s Little Catechism from elementary education. The leading argument at the time was that the Catechism was an unsuitable teaching aid from the point of

view of developmental psychology (17).

The same pattern recurred fifty years later. As already mentioned, the 1969 curriculum with its possibilities for pupil-centred teaching in existential questions was introduced in parallel with the presentation of a large investigation of youth psychology which indicated that teenagers in Sweden were deeply engaged in such questions. Hence it was possible to justify teaching through existential questions on developmental-psychological grounds instead of giving purely educational policy reasons for the proposed change (18).

Now I do not believe that the strong position of developmental psychology within progressivism, and to some extent within the Swedish school debate, should be seen only as a tactic of always using confirmatory research results. The interest in developmental psychology was also a consequence of the endeavour within progressive education to work in child-centred ways. There was a desire to move away from the collective memory exercises and rote repetition of the old elementary school. Individualisation and interest became contemporary watchwords. This is how Dewey expresses the matter:

> 3. I believe that interests are the signs and symptoms of growing power. I believe that they represent dawning capacities. Accordingly the constant and careful observation of interests is of the utmost importance for the educator.
>
> I believe that these interests are to be observed as showing the state of development which the child has reached.
>
> I believe that they prophesy the stage upon which he is about to enter.
>
> I believe that only through the continual and sympathetic observation of childhood´s interests can the adult enter into the child´s life and see what it is ready for, and upon what material it could work most readily and fruitfully.
>
> (19)

By taking children´s interests as the starting point, the need for individualisation was met. Further, the focus on interests represented a built-in curriculum principle. But even more important was

perhaps the fact that the principle of individualisation in turn became a solution to the dilemma of giving children from widely differing cultures and social classes what they needed within the framework of a single, integrated school system. Here, in my opinion, there are clear parallels with the position of Swedish religious education in schools just prior to the 1970´s. This in turn says something about why the type of child studies I present here were needed in Sweden.

Having this view, it was also natural for progressive educational theory to advocate theme studies that integrated the traditionally-offered school subjects. Subject integration, project work, interest centres, etc., are also forms of work encouraged in those Swedish curricula that have recommended an approach oriented towards existential questions.

TWO CONCEPTS

In this chapter I present two concepts that together form the conceptual basis for the interpretation of my results. I did not start with these concepts when I began my studies of children: they emerged as I returned to the material to try, through renewed analysis, to reach deeper understanding of the phenomena I had studied.

The educational aspects of the area have also been of some significance. I have pondered on what underlying characteristics there may be in the subject area implied in the various curriculum documents when they recommend that teaching should be based on pupils´ existential questions 20).

Existential Question

The new educational orientation that the 1969 curriculum may be said to represent as far as religious knowledge is concerned, was linked with the concept expressed in Swedish as "livsfråga". A literal translation would be "life question", but I have preferred the term "existential question" since it better preserves the existential overtones of the original.

The term was not defined when it was introduced into the curriculum, nor was this done in the 1980 version, although existential questions receive even more space here. The 1969 text contains three components under this heading. The first was a statement from child and young-adult psychology about the occurrence of existential questions, the second was a methodological recommendation on how one may use existential questions in education, and the third was examples of what could be meant by the term. But no explicit definition of the concept was given. The following quotation illustrates how it was dealt with:

> Fundamental existential questions (livsfrågor) of a personal and social nature are experienced strongly by children and young adults. ... It is vital that what, for them, are essential questions concerning ethics and systems of belief be the subjects of study from all angles. The work can be based both on belief-system and ethical questions important for the pupils and on teaching material direct.
>
> (Such questions) touch upon life and death, responsibility and guilt, suffering and humaneness, fear and security, loneliness and togetherness.
>
> (21)

This curriculum text was produced at about the time I was working on my first investigation of children´s interests connected with religious instruction in schools. As we shall see, it became clear that the children were interested in questions that by the formulation in the curriculum could be classified as existential. We therfore examined whether the concept could also be used in research.

It now became necessary to find another way of arriving at the definition of the concept that the curriculum had not given. We had to determine the area the concept was to cover. With our investigation results as background, we also considered the function, context, form and intention of the entity denoted by the term existential question.

The area was, intentionally, given a very broad delimitation. A strict and exact classification and delimitation of subject areas is a somewhat definite expression to use for organising one´s environment. Though cherished by researchers, it does not necessarily correspond to the experience of others. The pedagogical group behind the use, in the curriculum, of the term "existential question" do state that children´s lives are not divided up into subjects even though the traditional school happens to be so divided. The same thing applies here to children´s philosophy of life (22).

These are some of the reasons why we settled for the following broad definition of the concept existential question: An existential question concerns the fundamental conditions for human life and for existence in general.

My early investigation results had already given cause for reflection on the function of the phenomenon "existential question". Taking such aspects into account, the concept clarifies somewhat. The assumptions that follow concerning the character of existential questions were tentative when first written down, but have been reinforced through my later studies and through fresh analysis of the first investigation material.

Human beings ask existential questions because they reflect on themselves and their lot. There is a desire to understand, and find meaning in, one´s existence. This is a lifelong process, and entails taking, in various ways, some sort of stance with regard to existential questions. The expressions vary, both as to degree of abstraction and as to external frame of reference but, basically, they can be traced back to fundamental questions of human life and existence in general.

Certain contours in this pattern, but far from all, are common to everyone - people are all born, live together and die. Those of the fundamental conditions that are common would then also create prerequisites for a certain community of issues in the area of existential questions.

The context in which existential questions arise also tells us something about the nature of the phenomenon. Questions of this kind do not occur to a person like a revelation out of the blue: they surely express the typical human characteristic of reflecting on existence instead of merely responding to it through reflex actions as animals do. Existential questions always germinate in a certain life situation. This is not to say that the particular situation in which the question has come up must also be the one that has caused the question. Every situation where an existential question arises includes a person, a subject; so that the person´s earlier experience must be taken into account when considering the origin of the existential question.

On this view, then, existential questions result from a person´s encounter with his environment and with existence in general. It is

then reasonable to assume that the way of formulating such questions and making them explicit will depend on the environment or the social base in which they arose. Different surroundings thus bring different reasons, and perhaps also different opportunities, for reflection on the existential-question nexus. This in turn can entail different parts of the nexus having differing degrees of urgency in different surroundings, and different existential importance for different persons.

Concerning the form existential questions may take, there are two things to say. The expression of an existential question does not always need to have the form of a question: the question may be expressed in action, for example as free play, drawings or other forms of creative activity. Not infrequently it may be formulated as a provocative statement, as a thesis on Life pinned up for examination.

The other formal aspect of the phenomenon "existential question" relates to cognitive development. It is well known that people´s ways of thinking and reflecting vary. The basic patterns to be found, with variations, in most theories of the development of thinking ability show a move from the I-centred to the un-centred, from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general and from the simple to the complex. Varying numbers of way-stage are counted in this development, and opinions also exist on the nature of the force driving this development; but the overall pattern seems to be largely similar for the majority of theorists. With this background it seems to be reasonable to imagine that there are also developmentally conditioned differences as regards people´s ways of dealing with issues of the existential-question type. It may be that in individuals of differing cognitive maturity there will be found differing levels of reflection or ways of going about thinking and reasoning on existential questions (23).

Lastly, I have pondered yet another aspect of the phenomenon "existential question", which I here term intentionality. A given life situation, given experience and the human habit of reflecting on all these matters, may be said to be the soil in which existen-

tial questions germinate. But where do the questions lead? I believe that behind the existential questions there lies a more or less conscious struggle to find an answer. The questions germinate somewhere, they have the power of growth; but what then is the direction in which they grow?

It is here that my second concept comes in. Relating the phenomenon "existential questions" to the phenomenon "personal world view" is, I believe, a way of making plain the intentional aspect of existential questions (24).

Before discussing the concept of personal world view, I shall summarise my assumptions about the character of existential questions in a fairly exhaustive concept definition:

> *An existential question is one concerning the fundamental conditions for human life and for existence in general. The form an existential question takes may vary, but it is always a personal expression of the need to process and formulate experience of one's surroundings and of existence in a wide sense. Thus it is also a step in the person's endeavour to interpret and understand life.*

Personal World View

The Swedish term "livsåskådning" has no direct English equivalent. The German "Lebensanschauung" is, however, a direct linguistic parallel. The more frequently-used German term "Weltanschauung" is parallel in meaning, and its English equivalent, "world view", is, I believe, a more relevant rendering of the Swedish than the literal translation "life view" (25).

The totality represented by existential questions and world view is what I, for the present, have termed "philosophy of life" - the title of this study.

First, a comment. I have found it useful here to distinguish between a world view as an established religious or political doctrine and a personal world view as it functions in an individual.

An established world view or doctrine is one that has been written down. It is a construction of thought such as Christianity, Islam, Marxism, Liberalism, Anthroposophy, Naturism, etc. It is a collection of traditions that one, so to say, can put between covers.

A personal world view is something else. It can of course be affected by one or more of the established world view traditions, but it chiefly says something about the individual´s way of understanding existence and relating to it. Such an understanding and way of relating is within every one of us. In this sense, I believe all human beings have a personal world view, though they may not necessarily be aware of it in such a way as to be able to formulate clearly what it implies. It can be adopted uncritically from one´s immediate surroundings. One may not have internalised it, made it one´s own. Nor has one, perhaps, succeeded in integrating the different parts to make a consistent whole. Yet it is something one lives with, and perhaps something that helps one to live (26).

There are three important sides to a personal world view that may be worth bearing in mind. First what one might call the theoretical side. This consists of a person´s convictions and conception of the world - what one believes in and what one knows and what has significance for one´s personal world view. Here can be counted faith and knowledge within a number of areas, all relating to different aspects of existence. The following elements are usually found in most world view systems, and are also more or less consciously formulated in a personal world view:

- conception of man
- conception of society
- conception of God
- cosmology
- concept of reality
- concept of history

Convictions and conceptions of the world, or faith and knowledge, vary greatly among different world view traditions and among different people, but there is generally some form of conception, explicit or not, in all these respects. Conceptions in one area become dependent on conceptions in others. The conception of man is influenced by the conception of society, and vice-versa. One´s way of viewing reality, time and space, may be related to one´s conception of God, etc.

Another side of a personal world view is that of value-judgments. Some kind of value system is included in all established world views, where it is largely dependent on the concepts included in conviction and conception of the world. Value-judgments generally affect one of the following three aspects: what is

- good or evil
- right or wrong
- beautiful or ugly

Value-judgments are expressed continually in one´s way of looking at existence and in one´s way of living. They are often, but not always, based upon what one considers one believes or knows.

The third side of the world view is the actual practice: that is, a person´s actions and readiness to act, where the more theoretical sides of the world view are put into practice. Thus a personal world view is not only a way of contemplating life, but a way of living.

A personal world view is not in my opinion a fixed, closed intellectual construction where the furniture is appointed once and for all. In fact, it corresponds to the individual´s existential questions: the answers one has sought to the existential questions have been fitted into one´s personal world view. They need not be answers in the usual sense: they may equally well be attitudes to the existential questions, or a way of processing them or indeed a way of deepening them. When a person´s circumstances shift in different phases of life, he or she is also faced with new existential ques-

tions. The answers or attitudes then sought add new elements to the world view. Convictions are reassessed, one´s conception of the world is enlarged and one´s way of life is changed. Every change in one component of the world view affects the other components.

On this view, one´s personal world view becomes an ongoing development in which one continually processes one´s shifting experience and circumstances. A recurring imbalance between existential questions and world view, or between different sides of one´s world view, is a force driving its gradual development and maturing.

Figure 2 is an attempt to illustrate the relationship between a person´s existential questions and his personal world view. I have also noted that both phenomena are affected by individual variations and by social background factors.

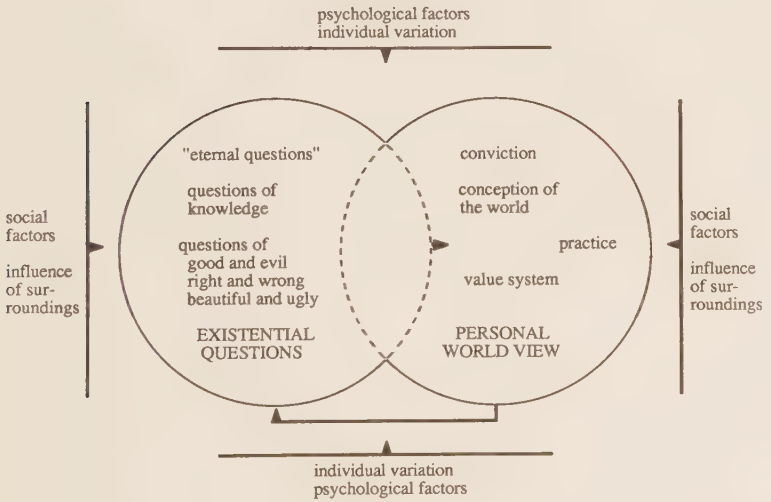

Figure 2. Working model for describing relationships between existential questions and personal world view.

Commentary

There are at least two conceivable objections to this way of using the concepts existential question and personal world view. One is that the definitions have been framed much too widely. The other is that the concepts have assumed an intellectualist overtone, risking the loss of important dimensions of the totality they represent.

Before discussing these objections I would note simply that my use of the concepts was determined primarily by my work on the investigation material, where they have functioned well. They have been relevant both to the material and to research in neighbouring fields. I believe this will be clear from the relatively comprehensive analysis and summary of results I have been able to make in Swedish (27). Whether it will also be clear from this shortened English version is not for me to say.

Experience of working on the material shows that the broad definition of concepts has been an advantage. The border between children´s existential questions and their thoughts in the widest possible sense must be kept fluid since it is impossible in each individual case to determine what may be fundamental conditions of life for any one person. It is equally difficult to determine the degree of urgency in a theme somebody raises in an interview or in an essay. My broad definition makes it possible to recognise an existential question when it appears, without having to discard other questions the children are working on as non-existential.

Using the two concepts, I have tried to describe the interplay between existential questions and personal world view that arises when a person reflects on his own life. This interplay is many-facetted and richly varied, and could easily be distorted if one attempted to force it into a too rigidly defined conceptual framework.

As regards the risk that the two concepts might give an intellectual bias to work on the material, I think such objections may be expected from many quarters. Religious phenomenologists can with

some justification maintain that religious phenomena cannot be understood from the same premisses as, for example, philosophical and political systems of thought. A life in faith is qualitatively different from what I here call world view. The concept may be felt to lack substance (28).

Some may say that the very idea of describing religious phenomena in these terms is a typical Western product that would be inconceivable in other cultures, but one that, perhaps, becomes understandable if one considers the protestant environment in which it arose. It is also possible that psychologists of a humanistic turn of mind will maintain that my way of using these concepts places overmuch weight upon intellectual aspects of children´s worlds of ideas, and this at the expense of the affective life.

These objections may well be correct, but the fact remains that I feel I have, with the help of these concepts, reached a better understanding of the phenomena I have studied. It is possible that this is because the educational aspects have been so important in the design of the investigations. My child studies, for example, have been carried out in some form of school milieu.

A characteristic property of a school is that, by merely being there, it renders life abstract. The very existence of a school building forces one to symbolise and talk about Real Life Outside, instead of living it (29). From the Swedish perspective, one can only remember that since 1962 Swedish schools have taught about religion, not taught religion, and, moreover, that this must take place in an objective manner (30).

In as far as my conceptual apparatus does abstract and intellectualise, I think that this has a correspondence in the phenomena I have studied, i.e. different expressions of children´s philosophy of life. This is not to say that my concepts embrace everything that would be interesting to study in this connection. How well the concepts correspond to the phenomena studied will emerge from the next two chapters.

PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

In this chapter I present the seven investigations upon which my empirical material has been based. The investigations are spread over a period of ten years and have differed in purpose and design. Different methods have been used. And yet each study in its own way has afforded knowledge of what I here term children´s philosophy of life (31).

It is a shortcoming that the material consists of seven separate cross-sectional studies. If all the enquiries gathered together in the material had been directed towards a single investigation group followed over time, considerably deeper knowledge of children´s philosophy of life could have been gained. But, on the other hand, when I started, I lacked the experience of methods of investigation, material interpretation and children´s thoughts that I have now.

This presentation reports the main results that could be directly read out from the investigations. The subsequent work of interpreting the results in a broader theoretical context will be reported in the next chapter.

Four interest investigations

1. The first interest investigation was carried out in 1969-70 within a project aimed at trying to solve the methodological problems associated with the goal of objective religious teaching. The project was directed at the middle-school level of the comprehensive school, with pupils aged 10-12 years. The task of the interest studies in this connection was to try and see traditional religious teaching through the eyes of the pupils (32).

The purpose was to give a picture of middle-school pupils´ attitude to school instruction in Christian knowledge and to investigate

their interest in certain problem areas linked with the subject. To illuminate pupil interest further, the results were related to a number of background factors.

An introductory review of the literature showed fairly comprehensive research in the field of the teaching of religion. The greater part of this research, however, was concerned with ages other than the period between 10 and 12 years, where investigations were relatively few and far between.

A view that occurred frequently in the literature of child psychology seemed to be that children aged 10-12 were thought to be extroverted and completely rooted in the present, without interest in so-called deeper questions.

Our material was gathered using teacher-administered pupil questionnaires answered by 2,081 pupils at 89 randomly selected schools throughout Sweden. The questionnaire covered three main areas: attitude to the teaching of Christian knowledge, interest in certain existential questions, and pupils´ religious commitment. The pupils spent about one hour filling in the questionnaire form.

Two months after the investigation, a retest was carried out in twelve class divisions. The connection between the results of the two tests showed that the general stability of the results was satisfactory.

Pupils´ attitudes to the teaching of religion were examined in an assessment schedule with paired comparisons. Eight school subjects were compared. For each pair, the pupils had to state which subject they liked better. The number of choices Christianity as a subject received in comparison with the other subjects served as a measure of the subject´s popularity. Religion proved to be unpopular. The majority of pupils gave the subject only one vote in the assessment schedule, or none at all. The median for the 4th year was 1.51, for the 5th year 1.12 and for the 6th year 0.92. In other words, interest in the subject sank during the middle-school period. Popularity points in the 5th and 6th years differed signifi-

cantly from those in the 4th year. Fourth-year girls were also more positively inclined towards the subject than boys in the same year.

The pupils that said they believed in God were more positive towards the subject than other pupils were. The subject Religion did not, however, appear as a favourite subject for the "believers": popularity scores were fairly low in this group too. There were no differences in attitude to the subject Religion between different social groups, endowment groups or types of locality.

Subject matter of story-telling type was, according to the pupils´ answers, a popular part of the teaching. The same applied to group work of different kinds. As against this, bible study was a problematical element in the teaching. This type of subject matter was experienced by the pupils as something foreign to them: "uninteresting to someone who doesn´t believe in God". A multiple-choice question for finding out what pupils wanted to know about Jesus showed that many obviously questioned whether Jesus had really lived. Thoughts such as this did not occur to the same extent in the 4th year as in the 5th and 6th years.

In a special section of the form, pupils had to assess their interest in 31 existential questions. The results showed that remarkably large numbers said they were interested in such questions.
The greatest interest was in a subject concerned with space and the origins of life; but questions about suffering in the world, conditions in developing countries, problems of loneliness and relations between friends also appeared to engage pupils´ interest strongly.

Considerably less interest was shown in questions of what is right and wrong, and what happens to a human being when (s)he dies. The lowest interest was shown in questions concerning religious problems. Interest in the questions expressing hesitance and doubt regarding religion was somewhat higher.

Where two questions had similar content, but one was couched in religious terms, pupil interest in the "religious" question was

significantly weaker. The religious terminology seems to have had a dampening effect on pupil interest in existential questions.

In the majority of tasks, the girls showed greater interest in the questions than did the boys of the same age, and this was particularly so for questions with a religious content.

The results in the items intended to measure the pupils´ religious commitment showed that the great majority did not see themselves as believers. There was a significant spread among the religious attitudes. In the majority of classes there were at least one or two pupils who fully embraced a Christian faith, but also some who opposed anything to do with religion. The material showed fairly large differences between the sexes regarding the religious attitudes. Girls were more positively inclined towards religion than boys were. Also, more 4th-year pupils than 5th-year thought of themelves as believers. Age differences were particularly noticeable among the girls. The answer alternatives that increased most with age did not, however, imply a withdrawal from religious faith, but express, rather, uncertainty and doubt.

In its entirety, this interest study gave a picture of the point of departure for religious education at middle-school level. On the one hand, most pupils showed very little interest in religious education as they had experienced it; nor was their religious commitment specially strong. There was no general "childhood faith" among Swedish children. The doubt that most developmental psychologists are wont to ascribe to the teens already existed in the children in this investigation. On the other hand, there seemed to be very great and widespread interest in existential questions.

It was in the field between these two poles that attempts were made to find new starting points for a new approach to religious education at middle-school level (33).

2. The second interest study, headed "What do Children Think About?", was carried out in 1970-71 as a complement to the first.

The result that had emerged from the questionnaire did not tally with the picture of later childhood then current. Earlier child psychology has been inclined to view the emotional balance, the expansive activity, the great dependence on group norms and rules, the factual attitude to one´s environment, and other characteristics normally found in pre-adolescents, as a sign that these children lack the prerequisites for an inner life. Strictly speaking, pre-adolescents were considered rather superficial and uninteresting. Observations from our first investigation showing children´s great interest in existential questions did not tally with this picture at all. For this reason, we wished to check our results by trying to make an inventory of children´s spontaneous thoughts using a different and less directive method (34).

The overall field of enquiry with which the second investigation was concerned was formulated thus: what thoughts, questions and problems associated with existence and the world in general are of immediate interest to children of 10 to 12 years of age?

The study covered 377 pupils from five schools in different parts of Sweden. The children were shown nine slides of children of their own age. Each picture was followed by a short, unfinished story. The pupils were asked to look at the pictures, try and associate with the situation presented and then finish the little story. They were asked to write down what they thought the boy or girl in the picture was thinking about and feeling.

The short texts gathered in this way were then analysed for content. The inter-assessor reliability of the content analysis was checked by 148 randomly selected texts being coded independently by two researchers. 85% of the texts were placed by the coders in exactly the same sub-category. For the remaining 15%, the coders had placed the material in categories that were very near each other.

The content analysis showed both depth and breadth in the pupils´ texts. The results were summarised in the following points:

- in their answers to the nine completion items, the pupils

had treated a multiplicity of different themes. This was true both for the pupil group as a whole and for the individual pupils.

- it was possible in the changing material to discern certain main themes that recurred with variations, indicating the presence of some problem community in the age group.

- a prominent feature of the material collected was that a large part of the answers treated existential questions. These themes occurred side by side with other simpler and more light-hearted subjects.

The two commonest themes in the text material concerned problems of loneliness and those of violence and suffering in the world. Some two-thirds of the 377 pupils raised the theme of loneliness spontaneously in their texts. The second theme was touched upon by more than one-third of the pupils.

The texts treating the theme of loneliness were dominated by children who had been teased or bullied by others. In the texts concerning war, two currents of opinion could be discerned: war is something terrible and frightening, and war is something that is clearly unnecessary and insane.

The text material also contained a large number of other questions: the origin and the enigma of the universe, questions about how the human body and other organisms function, the uncertainty of the future, guilt feelings, the meaning of life and death (35).

In the first interpretation of the results we found that the pupils´ interests were probably not a static phenomenon. We took into account the fact that they could be changed and influenced by education, the media, friends, parents, etc. We considered it probable that the results, at least to some extent, reflected problems of immediate interest in the children´s milieu. For this reason, we thought that the results could not be viewed as a fixed catalogue of problems and questions of present concern to children at a

certain age. Pupils' interests were not primarily to be related to their status according to developmental psychology, but rather to their circumstances. The specific content of the questions the children had formulated were seen as being of less interest than the actual species of theme that recurred throughout the text material.

The investigation showed, then, that the middle-school pupils appeared capable of richly-varying thought on many large issues. In view of what has often been said in child psychology concerning later childhood, we drew the following conclusions based on the results of the investigation: the emotional balance usually ascribed to later childhood ought not to be interpreted as a cold and emotionally slack attitude to life.

The curiosity, the activity and the zest for gathering facts often observed during these years ought not to be interpreted as indicating a purely extroverted and superficial way of being.

The great zest for rules and questions of fairness and the great dependence on group norms can not be taken as evidence that later childhood is marked by a limited moral sense. Rather, it can be seen as one of many eruptions of a burning commitment to general questions of fairness.

The factual attitude to questions related to the world view and religion which are usually ascribed to children during later childhood should not be interpreted as implying that human beings during these years lack the prerequisites for personal commitment to religious and ideological subjects.

The circumstance that children during this period cannot yet think entirely in abstract terms should not be interpreted to mean that they devote themselves exclusively to concrete and material questions, or that they lack what is needed for thinking and expressing their thoughts on large and imponderable questions.

Anders undrar över .Vad..fanns..innan..jorden.....
.existerade..hur.såg.det.ut.vad.var.det.....
..jag.undrar..hur.jorden.kom.till..Hur.länge
..har..fanns..inget..funnits.....

Sån't kommer man att tänka på när Varför..finns..vi...
.människor.,av..vilken.anledning?Vi.....
.gör..knappast..nagon.nytta.,.krigar,.dödar
..och..sånt.där.....

What was there before the world existed, what did it look like. what was it. I wonder how the world started. How long was there nothingness.

Why do we people exist, what is the reason? We hardly do anything useful, make war, kill each other and so on.

Boy, aged 11

3. The Children and Ideology project began with an inventory of problems among teachers. The investigation had as its purpose to gather information on possible difficulties arising when religious and ideological questions were brought up in the teachers´ groups. In this connection the teachers were also asked how often existential questions occurred in their groups and how important to the children they judged them to be. In this respect, this investigation may also be viewed as an interest study, even though the method was indirect, the information being obtained via the teachers´ questionnaire answers (36).

The investigation was carried out during the spring of 1974 as a questionnaire mailed to 726 pre-school teachers, middle-school teachers and recreation instructors selected at random. The non-response rate was about 23% of the investigation group.

The inventory of problems showed among other things that several teachers had problems regarding how to handle existential questions in their groups. In particular, questions of a religious or political nature were felt to be sensitive and difficult to deal with.

Consideration of the children´s home environment and level of maturity was a key problem in this connection.

What is perhaps more important here is that the teachers also assessed the occurrence of existential questions in their groups. They estimated how often children spontaneously brought up questions within fifteen different problem areas.

The results showed firstly that existential questions did occur unprompted in the groups. Very common was the type of question referring to daily life. Questions of considerateness and tolerance, outbursts of feelings, responsibility and conscience, ownership, differences among people, loneliness and forsakenness and family relationships were assessed by all the teachers as being common or very common in their groups.

Questions of the type faith and religion, how life is passed on, mankind and death, how everything started, conceptions of society and politics, were by no means as common, but nevertheless occurred regularly in most of the groups.

There was an appreciable difference between the assessments made by middle-school teachers on the one hand and by pre-school teachers and recreation instructors on the other. Children´s questioning was assessed lower by the middle-school teachers, with the exception of one theme - faith and religion. We interpreted this as an effect of the difference between the three teacher groups as regards teaching traditions. At school, it is Miss who asks the questions. Thus there seems to be not as much room for the children´s questions at the middle-school level as in pre-school and at the children´s leisure centre. This did not seem to be the case for questions about faith and religion, however. It simply reflects the fact that Swedish elementary schools have always had Religion on the time-table, but this has never been so in pre-schools and at children´s leisure centres.

Taken together the results showed that existential questions were asked in groups of children that were considerably younger than

those we had studied earlier. The results also indicated the importance of including factors of the milieu as part of the background to the children´s questions.

4. The fourth interest investigation was conducted in 1979-80, and can be seen as a parallel investigation to the first two. We wished to check whether the results we had reached ten years before still held good (37).

The purpose of this investigation was to answer the following questions:

What thoughts, questions and problems of existence and the world around one are of immediate interest to children aged 9-13? Are there any differences in the results depending on the age, sex and social background of the children?

How do the results of this investigation relate to earlier interest studies? What differences can be observed, and what are their causes?

The investigation was carried out using pupil questionnaires administered by teachers in 32 classes from 3rd year to 6th year in four schools in different parts of Sweden. 725 pupils took part.

The questionnaire was in four sections. The first concerned leisure interests and attitudes towards various elements of school. In the second section the children had to decide about a number of "existential themes" and say whether they thought it was interesting and important to think them over. The third section raised questions relating to the pupils´ belief in God, to Jesus, to the Creation, to man, to the future and to democracy. The fourth part of the questionnaire was a completion item where the pupils finished the sentences "I feel this happy when I think about ... " and "I feel this unhappy when I think about ... " when they looked at the two figures overleaf.

The results showed almost complete agreement with those of the earlier interest investigations. There was a great breadth of variation in the children´s interests. Burning interest in leisure activities was linked with deep commitment concerning certain existential questions.

Interest in school religious education was low in comparison with that in other subjects. The new 1969 curriculum did not appear to have altered this state of affairs. On the other hand, the children were clearly interested in many themes which, according to the curriculum, it should have been possible to bring up in the religious teaching. The investigation gave no answer as to whether this had in fact happened.

Existential questions about relations between people, about fairness, unemployment, war and suffering were judged by the children to be interesting and important. Questions about the origin of life and about death were thought much more important than traditional Christian questions, which aroused the least interest of all the questions in the questionnaire.

Figure 3 below shows the results of the interest assessment of the twenty existential questions in the form. The figure gives the percentage of pupils who answered that the question was "important". The figure also illustrates the sex differences observable in the results.

A tendency in these results indicated a greater interest among girls in questions concerning social relationships. They were also more interested than the boys in questions with religious over-

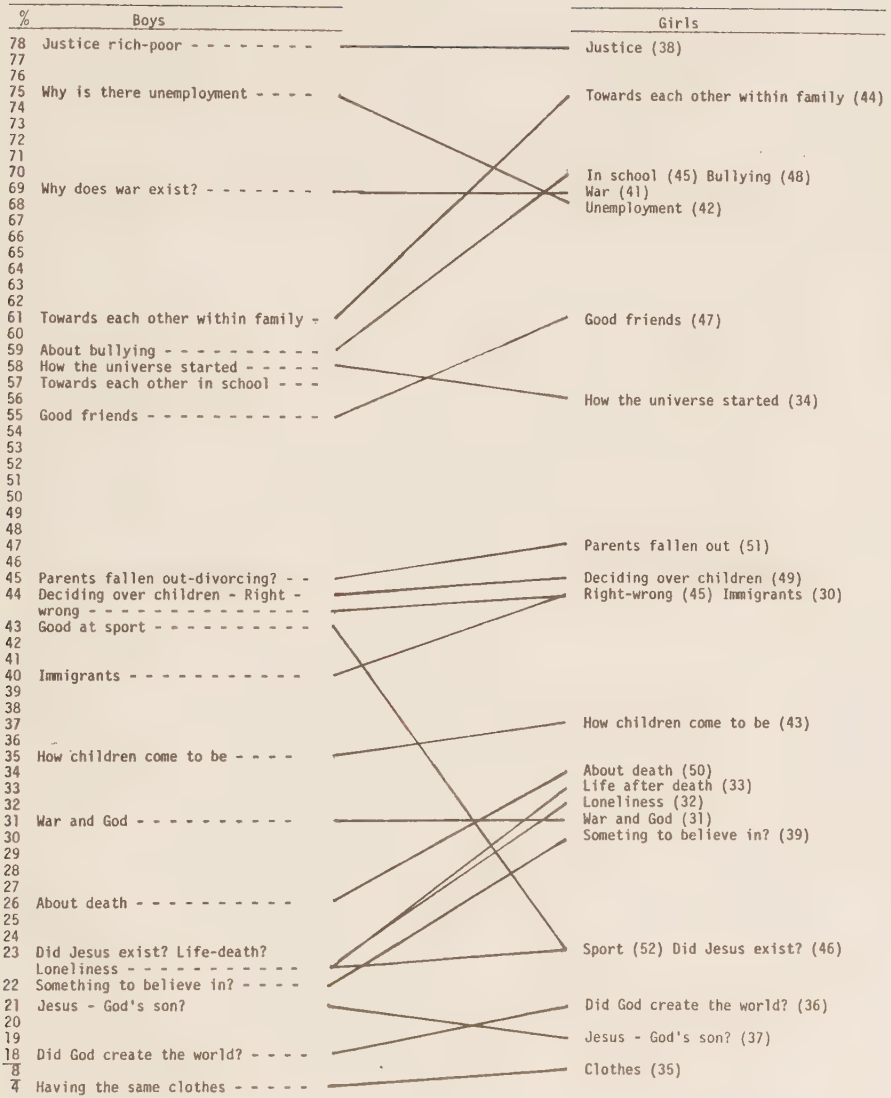
%
Boys
Girls
78 Justice rich-poor - - - - - - - -
Justice (38)
75 Why is there unemployment - - - -
Towards each other within family (44)
69 Why does war exist? - - - - - - - -
In school (45) Bullying (48)
War (41)
Unemployment (42)
61 Towards each other within family -
Good friends (47)
59 About bullying - - - - - - - - - -
58 How the universe started - - - - -
57 Towards each other in school - - -
How the universe started (34)
55 Good friends - - - - - - - - - - -
Parents fallen out (51)
45 Parents fallen out-divorcing? - -
Deciding over children (49)
44 Deciding over children - Right - wrong - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
Right-wrong (45) Immigrants (30)
43 Good at sport - - - - - - - - - -
40 Immigrants - - - - - - - - - - -
How children come to be (43)
35 How children come to be - - - -
About death (50)
Life after death (33)
Loneliness (32)
31 War and God - - - - - - - - - -
War and God (31)
Someting to believe in? (39)
26 About death - - - - - - - - - -
23 Did Jesus exist? Life-death? Loneliness - - - - - - - - - - -
Sport (52) Did Jesus exist? (46)
22 Something to believe in? - - - -
21 Jesus - God's son?
Did God create the world? (36)
Jesus - God's son? (37)
18 Did God create the world? - - - -
8
4 Having the same clothes - - - - -
Clothes (35)

Figure 3. Result from a form for assessing interest in twenty existential questions. The figure gives the percentage of pupils answering for each case that the question (here abbreviated) is "important".

tones. It was not possible to observe in the material any differences between social groups or between localities.

The children´s answers to the questions that concerned their attitudes to ideological and religious issues indicated strong commitment to justice and democracy. As against this, a doubting or negative position dominated regarding the world of religious concepts.

Two essay-based investigations

The element of free writing included in the interest investigations proved to be of value in the assessment of pupils´ spontaneous thoughts. For this reason, two investigations were carried out that were based entirely on this form of expression. The pupils were asked to write freely on a given subject relating to part of their personal world view.

1. The first study using this method was carried out in 1977-78, and concerned children´s faith in God. The children were asked to write what they liked on the subject "Once when I was thinking about God". Collection of the material was arranged by their class teachers following written instructions from those responsible for the research. The participants were 745 pupils aged from 9 to 13 years, from eight different places in the country. The schools chosen represented different types of area - city, suburb, small town, and country area (38).

Apart from the essay itself, the children also had to write down particulars of sex, age, job plans and their parents´ work.

During the first processing, content analysis revealed a number of prominent features in the large volume of essay material. The material clearly indicated that children of this age reflect on what is inexplicable in their lives. Although the subject was directed towards a given theme, many children took this opportunity to reflect on a number of existential questions without any parti-

cularly religious bias.

Quantitative analysis was used to establish, among other things, what situations the children had mentioned as typical occasions for thinking about God, what questions about God they formulate, and the extent to which the essays expressed faith, doubt or non-faith.

The two most common types of situation the children, specially the girls, associated with thoughts about God were crisis situations and the time just before going to sleep. Then came religious services and lessons and competition or achievement situations (specially the boys, this), and finally situations where the children encountered death in their surroundings.

The most common questions the children formulated about God were: Is there a God? - What does God look like? - What´s God like? - Where is God - Did God create the world? - Who created God? The questions bear witness to the children´s fairly anthropomorphic picture of God.

Direct expressions of a personal belief in God were more common among the younger children and among the girls than among the others in the group investigated. According to the content analysis, eleven for girls and twelve for boys seemed to be an age of reassessment and doubt.

By and large the essay material showed that this form was well suited to reflecting children´s own thoughts on a difficult subject. For many, the study seemed a welcome opportunity for reflections on and formulation of very personal thoughts. The material strengthened the impression gained from the interest studies that children´s worlds of ideas at this age contain both depth and variation.

2. The second essay study was similar in design to the first, but aimed at a different dimension of the child´s personal world view. By asking the children to write under the heading "What is a human

being and what´s a human being like?" we wished to elucidate children´s conceptions of man (39).

In all, 716 children aged from 9 to 13 years took part in this investigation. They were in their 3rd to 6th year of school. The selection was made in the same schools as those taking part in the first essay investigation. The material was collected in 1978 and the first results were reported in 1980.

The conception of man is not such a clearly refined element in a personal world view as is the conception of God. From statements of educational goals, what should be brought up for elucidating the conception of God in different religions and cultures can be clearly seen; but the conception of man is not included as an equally defined object of study. The curricula themselves express a more or less clearly stated conception of man, rather than indicating what expressions of such a conception pupils should study (40).

This may possibly have affected the children´s equipment for expressing in writing their own conceptions of man. It was in fact the case that they found it considerably more difficult to put down on paper their thoughts about man than their thoughts about God. They found difficulty in discerning and formulating a conception of something so near to them as the phenomenon "man". They also appeared to lack terms in which to express the conception of man, which nevertheless appeared between the lines of their essays. On this point they were better equipped when it came to formulating their conceptions of God. The enigmatic and diffuse God on his distant cloud appeared far easier for the children to grasp.

The content analysis traced, among other things, the aspects that the pupils portrayed in their pictures of man. As will be seen in Figure 4 below, the younger children noted man´s external and internal physical characteristics, e.g. parts of the body, colour of hair, internal organs, etc. The somewhat older children liked to describe functions such as the circulation of the blood, digestion and the nervous system. The eldest children noted mental functions and psychological factors.

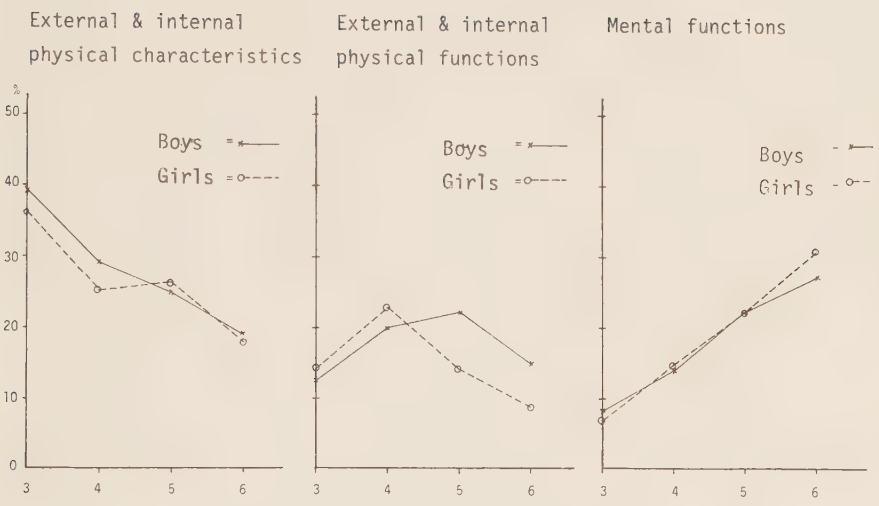

Figure 4

We also analysed whether the children´s pictures of mankind seemed to be optimistic or pessimistic, with or without nuances. This was related to the background factors included in the investigation material. The majority of children pictured both positive and negative sides of man´s nature. But even in the essays shaded with both light and dark pictures of man, there was often an underlying tone of pessimism. Of the 10% of essays that expressed a one-sided view of man, practically all gave pessimistic pictures.

The interview-based investigation

The studies reported above gave cause for a re-examination of the picture earlier child psychology has given of the age group 9-13 years. But what was the case for younger children? In the Child and Ideology project we had the opportunity of focusing partly on the same question areas as earlier, but with younger experimental subjects. Pilot studies for the investigation were done in 1975, but

the chief collection of material was in 1976. Various forms of data processing continued until 1980, and a connected final report was not published until 1986 (41).

The question we attempted to answer with the interview-based investigation was quite simply - What do younger children think about?

Our selection consisted of 96 pre-school children and 127 second-year juniors. As an aid in the interviews we developed material in which we drew on experience of the semi-projective-type techniques tested in two of the interest studies.

But studying younger children is more tricky. They cannot write, and they often find it difficult to absorb the type of instruction that is normally needed in connection with tests. We therefore had to develop a different method for the younger children, even though we consciously related this to our middle-school methodology. The instruments employed in the investigations involving the younger children took the form of slightly-directed interviews which were recorded on tape. The interviews or talks took place individually on two separate occasions. The first talk was introduced with a brief instruction and a little story to set the outline. The discussion was based on a series of fifteen pictures of a girl called Lena and a boy called Peter. The first four pictures together with a related text formed an introduction and then the interview proper began. The interview was based on seven different situations or atmospheres:

- Peter is sitting quite quietly by himself and thinking.
- Peter is lying thinking while waiting to go to sleep.
- Lena, one day when she is terribly angry about something that has happened.
- Lena one day when she feels on top of the world and is really happy.
- Lena is sitting alone enjoying herself.
- Once when Peter is terribly frightened because of something that has happened.
- Peter one day when he´s having a nice time and is just

going to do something he thinks will be great fun.

Quite early on we noticed that children of pre-school and lower-school age quite easily get caught up in a single theme during a talk. For this reason, we used among our instruments a "separating" technique in story-telling, changing between boy and girl pictures and between different atmospheres illustrated using strong, expressive pictures. For each situation raised in the interview, questions were asked about what one might think or feel in situations like the ones sketched. The first part of the talk was followed by another a week or so later. This was based on a similar technique, but the picture-based talking was not accompanied by any outline story. The only instruction given in this part was that the children should look at the pictures and then tell what they made them think about. This second part of the interview was based on eight pictures and some sentence-completion items.

Experience of our investigations shows that it can be hard to produce workable instruments to help in contacting children´s worlds of ideas. Most difficult has been the case of pre-school children. Difficult, but not impossible.

The next chapter reports the main results of the content analysis. Here I shall only point to one feature in the younger children that emerged clearly from the material and that illustrates one difficulty in the investigation method itself.

Small children find it difficult to think about their own thinking. This requires an ability to maintain a distance, which is something pre-school children mostly cannot manage, and which even 8-9-year-olds find difficult. Because of this, one can only reach small children´s direct reflections and associations if one uses this particular interview method. The type of summary "I have often thought about this and about this and about this ...", which we obtained from the older children´s "think-tanks" does not occur in the interview investigation.

CHILDREN´S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

I worked for some time on renewed analysis of the investigation material presented in the previous chapter, concentrating on the interviews, sentence completion items and essay material. The results from the closed-item questions together with the conceptual apparatus presented in Chapter 3 constitute a kind of "pre-understanding" in my analysis of the material.

The analysis has been directed partly at qualitative aspects of individual interviews and texts and partly at quantitative aspects of the material as a whole. Space allows only short glimpses of the qualitative type of analysis, which may lead to my conclusions appearing insufficiently supported. Moreover, some of the overtones in the children´s texts disappear in translation.

This chapter consists of excerpts from a fuller account of the analysis results published in Swedish (42). I hope, however, that these short sections may give a picture of the totality which I have termed children´s philosophy of life.

Children´s perspectives on life

In the discussion of the concept existential question (pages 16-20), we saw that question context and question form are of interest when trying to understand what lies behind children´s questions. In the quantitative analysis of the interview material and of the children´s own texts, these aspects have been elucidated by trying to picture children´s perspectives on life as reflected in their questions.

The material was mapped as follows. For all the children taking part, transcripts were made of the parts of the interviews that dealt with what children think about in general. The interview questions that were guided towards particular subject areas have

not been included in this part of the processing of the material. The typescripts were then coded according to a schedule of categories covering 65 different content categories grouped under seven main headings. The schedule was designed to work from I-centred content categories to more outward-looking ones and from concrete phenomena to more abstract. The same category schedule was used when coding the written materials gathered at middle-school level. The results of this coding are given in the Table Appendix.

The children´s choices of perspective and of subject area become clear through the coding, but not much was shown of their own commitment. 1,429 answer fragments from the interviews were coded.

Table 1 gives an outline picture of the two age groups´ choices of perspective regarding their reflections on life in general. The interview answers are divided into seven very broad main categories, and also by sex and age group. This gives a somewhat sketchy, flat picture of the children´s answers, but despite these limitations, a number of interesting circumstances can be read from the table.

Table 1.

Children's choice of perspective in the interview material. Percentage distribution by main category, school form and sex for the themes occuring in the children's interview answers.

Main category	*Pre-school children (< 7 yrs)*		*Children in second year of school (8-9 yrs)*	
	Boys	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*
Existential concepts	-	-	-	-
International events	-	-	2	2
Life processes	7	9	18	16
Society	19	19	20	16
Friends/(pre-)school	15	20	32	37
Family	18	17	8	9
I-centred answers	41	35	20	20
	100	100	100	100
All themes coded	177	291	520	431
Number of pupils	39	57	66	61

Table 1 clearly shows how the younger children are rooted in the I-centred perspective. Every second answer from pre-school children and every third from lower-school children concerns their own "I" or their families.

When one is little one´s field of view is necessarily limited, but, clearly, this is something that soon passes. The table shows how the emphasis shifts with increasing age. Already in the second year of the lower school, the proportion of I-centred answers and family themes decreases in favour of answers about friends and school, and of questions regarding life processes, i.e. questions about nature, life and death.

During the whole of the age period we worked on in our investigations, from five years up to the early teens, it is possible to observe an increasing preponderance of questions about friends and school. But this is only one element in the widened perspective that accompanies increasing age and experience. Events in the community stimulate questions. Things that are growing and germinating inside; the incomprehensibly large universe, life and death, present children with yet more questions. Gradually, the international perspective also enters the picture.

The absence of certain themes in Table 1 also says much about the two age groups we are concerned with here. Gleams of international awareness are rare, and wholly absent in the pre-school group. The questions we have termed existential are absent in both age groups. Under this category come only purely abstract existential questions including advanced concepts of a more or less philosophical nature. Well, even a relatively narrow perspective can admit profound thinking.

A further tendency can be observed in this material, and one which will prove to be yet more distinct in the material covering older children. This is a difference between the sexes, expressed partly in the fact that girls seem to have a lead over boys in maturity, so that they continually anticipate boys´ development. Also, girls show greater interest in contact with friends and in social rela-

tionships. While this tendency is weak in Table 1, it is identical with tendencies in Tables 2 and 3, where sex differences emerge even more clearly.

It is unavoidable for interview material to seem devitalised and lacking in nuances when served up in such a processed and refined form as in Table 1. The reader must wonder what can be hiding behind the different content categories, so I shall give examples of answers to one of the questions included in the interview.

The talks with the pre-school and lower-school children included an item where they themselves had to mention questions that they thought were really difficult. Tableaux 1 and 2 reproduce some of the answers in slightly edited form. The answers indicate that the multiplicity of life gives rise to a multiplicity of questions.

Children´s paths out into life are lined with questions. Many concern how things, plants and animals are put together and how they function. Our youngest children do not always distinguish between organic life and mechanical function. All things represent components of the world in which they are finding out where they are.

Then they begin school, where much is learned. They continue to find their way about in their surroundings. The horizon gradually opens on new worlds, but the old questions about the Beginning and the End, breadth and depth, remain, even though children perhaps learn to formulate them differently. Tableau 2 gives a number of examples of lower-school children´s answers to the same item in the interview study.

Tableau 1.

What do pre-school children find hard to understand? Some slightly edited answers from interviews with 96 pre-school children.

Why do the kids play ghost trains. You can fall down and hurt yourself.
Now I want to go home.
That I can't read.
I don't know how there came to be people. Lots of things are made of plastic and that.
How can animals live?
Why do they pull down houses? Why do people have flowers? Why are there weapons?
Why do people have cars? And when I'm going to play, then the others can't. That's a pity. Why are there houses?
How is it that butterflies can fly? Why's the sun up in the sky?
How can you build a snowman? How do people drive trains?
How many trains are there, how many cars, how many taxis, how many mopeds?
When there's a word you don't know.
There's lots of things - its difficult to think of anything - how the first people came? How can there be two people when there's only one to start with?
Talking and that, in Finland.
How was Jesus born? How cars come to be.
What flower looks like inside.
When mum's cross ...
Why can't I go to school and have homework?
People who come from another country are difficult to understand.
What's a bottle made of? Why d'you blow your nose such a lot. Why do people have to cough? Why can a fly fly? How do they make records?

Tableau 2.

What do primary-school children find difficult to understand? Some slightly edited answers from interviews with 127 primary-school children.

How the sun and the stars started? How the earth got split up into so many countries? How there are so many languages, and who thinks up the words? How there started being machines and things? I think it's hard to understand how the first machines came, and then those machines made other ones that we make things with.
When will the sun stop burning? What's the last number in arithmetic? (In your artithmetic book?) No, the last number of all in arithmetic.
What's the name of Holland's number 14 in football? - Johan Cryff. How did there come to be people? How did all the flowers and stones start?
What do cats do when they want to have kittens?
Why do I go to the (youth) Centre? Why can't children decide just as much as grown-ups? How do people make soap? How did there come to be people and animals?
Why do people have to die?
Why's the Council got so little money they can't buy toys and things?
What's the most important thing in the whole world? You don't know by yourself? I mean, the very most important, everybody who fights. About anything. Why must the grown-ups always decide? That's a hard question, too. What is it that's the same about a fox and a pig?
Before, multiplication was difficult, but now I can do it.
How does a war start, perhaps. Why do they let out all the sewage into fresh water?
Where do storms come from?
Why does there have to be God? Why do there have to be books? Why must people have a flat to live in?
What happens when you die? But I s'pose they don't know either. How everything starts, in you body - yes, where does everything come from? How the first animal came to be?
Why can't I have a kitten?
When's the sun going to go out? How many stars are there in space?
How many miles is space? How long does it take for there to be a planet?
Who was the first person on earth, or the first animal, or the first being?

Many of the themes in the tableaux recur in the middle-school material. There, the formulations are different; the words have been put down on paper. When the children have their own formulations in front of them, one thing easily leads to another, and in this way they have the opportunity of delving deeper into their own questions. This may be one reason why the middle-school children also place themselves, and their own being, in the wider contexts.

The question of the existence of everything is no longer seen as separate from one´s own existence, and vice-versa. A further reason for this is presumably the greater maturity of these children. Their ways of thinking have in general reached a level of development that involves reduced egocentricity. This makes it easier for them to contemplate existence so to say from the outside, from a distance.

In this way the investigation material illustrates fairly clearly what cognitive development can mean regarding one´s way of expressing existential questions: of formulating them and turning them about and about; developing and changing. Nevertheless, several questions remain fundamentally unchanged and recur at different age levels. Human beings develop, but in some respects their fundamental conditions of life remain the same.

Table 2 below gives the results of quantitative analysis of all the participating pupils´ answers to the sentence-completion items included in our second interest investigation. This study was based on a number of semi-projective-type tasks where the pupils were asked to write freely about what they thought the children shown in a number of slides were thinking about.

In the table, over 400 children in the 3rd to 6th years are represented with a maximum of six texts each. The texts have been coded into the sixty-five categories, but are combined in the table into their main content categories. The result of this combination is naturally that the individual variations disappear, but instead, an overall pattern emerges in the choice of perspectives in the child-

Table 2.

Choice of perspective in children's thoughts. Percentage distribution by main category, school year and sex for the themes occurring in the pupils' texts from the 1970 investigation "What do children think about?"

Main category	*3rd year*		*4th year*		*5th year*		*6th year*	
	B	*G*	*B*	*G*	*B*	*G*	*B*	*G*
Existential concepts	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
International events	7	8	4	6	7	6	8	10
Life processes	15	11	11	12	8	13	10	9
Society	3	1	5	5	4	4	3	8
Friends/(pre-)school	19	22	26	31	30	30	29	28
Family	9	9	10	13	10	16	14	18
I-centred texts	37	42	36	28	28	27	27	23
Other answers	10	7	8	5	13	3	8	3
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
No. of coded themes	302	294	401	416	433	343	501	577
No. of pupils	49	53	59	58	65	46	73	78

ren´s texts - or, if you will, a rough sketch of the world of children´s thoughts. My combination, in Tableau 3, of some of the pupils´ texts illustrates the kind of material coded in the content analysis.

Table 2 shows that children´s thoughts move over a broad spectrum, from the I-centred, one´s own belongings and leisure activities via family and friends to life processes and international phenomena. The results reflect the children´s expanding life-space and fields of experience. Examples of the types of text concerned are given in Tableau 3 overleaf.

What do children think about? Some exemples of answers from one of the sentence completion items in the 1970 interest investigation. The introduction to the experience had the following wording:

"Sometimes it happens that people wonder about things they can't really work out. This is Tom. You can see how he feels. Just now Tom is sitting puzzling about something he's thought about lots of times before, something he'd really like to know more about. Tom is thinking about..."

How many states are there in the whole world? You start thinking about things like that when you're talking about the world.

Boy, 6th year

He's wondering about what it would be like to be dead. How you'd feel, then. That's something you start thinking about when you're feeling sad and lonely (sometimes). Or you think about someone you know who'd dead (for example Granny, Grandpa, sister or a cousin).

Girl, 5th year

How can it be that our teacher knows such a lot and she's so good at nearly everything? That's something you start thinking about when you're sitting in school, working.

Girl, 4th year

Why is he so lonely. And he wants to know why his mates are so mean to him. That's what you think about when you see Tom so lonely. He hasn't been any trouble to anyone, but he's wondering why its HIM that has to be outside everything all through his time at school.

Girl, 5th year

Why is everything like it is? People say that God watches over the earth, but why do so many children have to starve when there's so much food, why are so many people cold when there's so many clothes?

Girl, 6th year

He's wondering about how he and all the animals, trees, seas, stones, mountains, grass, sky, sun, moon came to be. That's what you think about when you see a child being born and when animals are born and trees grow.

Boy, 6th year

The I-centred texts predominate, particularly among the younger children. In this category come texts that do not explicitly concern anyone or anything outside the child´s own person. It is natural that thoughts conjured up by tasks of the kind we are dealing with here tend to concern one´s own person; but the figures also reflect the tendency of childhood towards egocentric thinking. (No doubt, a tendency that never entirely disappears). The higher frequencies for the I-centred texts are, accordingly, found in the younger age groups.

Thoughts concerning circumstances and events in one´s own family are also common. Family relationships are a continually-recurring theme in the children´s texts. The family constitutes the base from which children explore the world and to which they constantly return. It could perhaps have been expected that the proportion of texts about the family would decrease with increasing age. However, the opposite is the case, particularly for the girls. Here there is reason to remember that thoughts and questions may often mean that some reassessment is going on. Increasing age and a widening of the field of vision are accompanied by a modified perspective regarding one´s own family, a perspective that can afford a realisation that the family is not an unmixed blessing - the family can be split in many ways - and that parents and family are not infallible. What is perhaps most important to note is the fact that even children reflect on the business of living in a family.

Understandably, friends and school occupy much space in the children´s writings - indeed they are about their colleagues and their daily work. Also, the texts were written in school time and among friends. There is a tendency towards an increase in texts of this type among the older children and, here too, specially among the girls. Also, the girls showed greater interest than boys in questions concerning social relationships and circumstances.

This is also clearly noticeable in the categories covering societal and international phenomena. One can see how outlooks broaden with age. Most remarkable, however, is that these subjects occur so generally in the children´s texts, in all the school years covered.

For better or for worse, newspapers and television have brought the outside world into living rooms and classrooms.

The main heading Life processes summarises a number of questions about the origin and the functional forms of life, about nature´s development and one´s own, and last but not least texts about death. Themes of this kind are a recurrent element in the material from all the school years studied.

One thing that cannot be read directly from the table is that the proportion of existential questions, i.e. questions about the basic conditions of human life, is large for practically all categories. But, typically, these questions are not expressed in abstract terms. Instead, they are placed in social contexts and related to family, friends and national and international phenomena. This is shown by the minimal frequency in the category Existential concepts. Here we placed texts which, so to speak, dealt with existential questions in pure, abstract form, most often in connection with concepts of the type anguish, faith, human dignity, and the like. This type of reasoning occurs only among the older children. Existential questions do often occur in the texts; but in concrete terms, not clothed in abstract language.

Here an objection is in place. This material is old. It was assembled as far back as 1970. Are the results still valid?

Our fourth, 1979, interest study included two completion items. This text material has undergone the same type of content anlysis as the earlier material. The result is given in Table 3 and in the Table Appendix.

The overall picture tallies well with that shown in Table 2, but certain differences between the sexes and between the age groups emerge here even more distinctly.

The older children raise to a greater extent themes relating to international phenomena, and to friends and school. This may be taken as a sign of a perspective on the world that has broadened with age. The younger children, on the other hand, are in a small majority when it comes to I-centred themes in texts about the family.

Table 3.

Choice of perspective in children's thoughts. Percentage distribution by main category, school year and sex for the themes occurring in the pupils' texts resulting from two sentence-completion tasks on the theme happy/unhappy included in the 1979 questionnaire.

Main category	*3rd year*		*4th year*		*5th year*		*6th year*	
	B	*G*	*B*	*G*	*B*	*G*	*B*	*G*
Existential concepts	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
International events	6	9	9	12	14	12	10	15
Life processes	17	18	16	21	11	16	13	14
Society	6	4	4	8	5	8	5	11
Friends/(pre-)school	8	15	16	12	18	21	14	22
Family	10	16	8	13	9	8	7	10
I-centred texts	53	38	47	34	43	35	51	28
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
No. of coded themes	173	225	232	319	278	359	221	380
No. of pupils	71	79	90	92	97	91	102	103

Compared with the text material analysed earlier, there is now a significantly larger proportion of I-centred texts. Much of the explanation surely lies in the design of the item, where the instruction runs "I feel this happy/unhappy when I think about ... ". In the earlier investigation the item was arranged differently, and it was a matter of identifying oneself with other, imagined, people in order to think oneself into different emotional atmospheres and then write down what one came to think about.

One feature, however, that cannot be explained by this circumstance

is the conspicuous sex difference in the children´s writings. The boys have to a consistently higher degree than the girls allowed an I-centred perspective to predominate in their texts on the happy/unhappy theme.

It is hard to find a simple explanation of this result. It may be that the girls´ greater maturity plays a part here, for this would lessen the tendency towards egocentric choices of perspective. But it would appear that, irrespective of age, the girls were more open and interested in social and interpersonal questions than the boys were. This comes out at many points in our material.

The most common questions

In this section I report on what questions recur most frequently in those parts of the investigation material that were directed at making inventories of children´s thoughts, i.e. the interview study and the second and fourth interest studies. I start with the results given in the large schedule of categories in the Table Appendix. Where additional material for the same age group has been available, I have considered the frequencies together so as to produce a simple ranking of the most frequently-occurring themes.

Being little clearly means that one often has cause to ponder over loneliness and fear. These are the two themes that recur most frequently in the interviews with pre-school children. These themes occur in parallel with the children´s less fear-filled reflections on their immediate everyday life in pre-school or when together with playmates. Several of the interview answers concern things the children wish to know more about: technical matters, something they have seen on television or read about, or something in nature. The conflicts pre-school children bring up relate chiefly to their families, though many mention conflicts between playmates. Thoughts about presents or other surprises are another pleasurable theme. Dreams of a pet of one´s own occur particularly often among the girls. The family as a source of happiness and security is also touched on in several answers.

These, then, are the themes that recur most frequently in the pre-school children´s answers to the generally-framed interview questions. The themes have been ranked according to frequency in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Ranking of the most frequently occuring themes in pre-school children's answers to interview questions designed to elicit what they think about. (43)

Ranking	*Content category (Code no.)*	*Comparison figure*
1	Loneliness, forsakenness (17+27+38)	62
2	Fear, sorrow (15)	44
3	Life in pre-school (34)	43
4	Questions on literature, films, TV, music, language (43+53)	41
5	Play and other activities (09)	38
6	Technology (42)	32
7	Conflicts (23+31)	31
8	How the natural world functions (46)	22
9	Being given things, presents, birthdays (05)	22
10	Togetherness, happiness, security (28)	15
11	Being given a pet (06)	12
12	My own body, illness, pain (13)	12
Number of children interviewed 96		

What is perhaps most striking in the table is that the loneliness theme is so prominent. As we shall soon see, this is also true for the older children. In pre-school children, it is loneliness in the home that predominates, while the older children more often bring up loneliness and forsakenness when writing about not having anyone to play with, or not being allowed to be with them.

This reflects the pre-school children´s social situation. Their dependence on the family is greater than that of their elders. At the same time the small two-generation family, which is after all a fairly recent phenomenon in our culture, means that it is precisely for small children that the risk of different kinds of loneliness becomes great.

The rest of the results also reflect the world that is the pre-school child´s own, a world of pre-school and play and questions about how everything in the expanding environment functions, be it cars or cranes or growing kittens that arouse his sense of wonder.

An important feature of the questions contained in the content categories shown in Table 4 is that they generally imply a direct reflection of children´s feelings and experiences, most often in connection with their own persons or with their families. Less often have the children in this age group formulated themselves at a more abstract level - made their questions into problems, as one might say. On the other hand, the results also show that the "problems" are there notwithstanding, even though they have not been formulated as such: pre-school children express in their answers a number of immediate observations which they find cause to ponder over and return to; but their reflections seldom come out as a clear interrogative.

In the lower-school children, one finds largely the same themes as in the youngest participants in the investigations, but the perspective has been widened, and there are even some pure "problem formulations" among the answers. For this age group, Table 5 ranks the content categories with the largest numbers of answers.

From the lower-school children we have material from three investigations to draw on: one from the 2nd year and two from the 3rd. The different sets of material differ in character, the first being collected through interviews and the others, written. The way of asking questions also varied. This means that the sets of material are not, strictly speaking, comparable. In spite of this I have

tried to consider them together in order to obtain the ranking shown in Table 5.

Among the lower-school children, too, loneliness predominates. Increased dependence on the peer group is reflected in the fact that the loneliness theme is mentioned more often in connection with friends than with the family. Lower-school children bring up bullying as a recurring theme, and this, too, reflects peer dependence. By and large, the bullying theme is equally common as a more general expresson of fear and sorrow. Conflicts with playmates or with family members are another recurring theme.

Table 5.

Ranking of the most frequently occuring themes in primary-school children's answers. Material taken from three investigations: I. Answers to seven interview questions designed to elicit what children think about (2nd-year). II. Texts from three sentence-completion tasks designed to elicit what children think about (3rd-year). III. Texts from two sentence-completion tasks on the theme happy/unhappy (3rd-yr). (43)

Ranking	*Content category (Code no.)*	*Comparison figures* I 2nd-yr	II 3rd-yr	III 3rd-yr
1	Loneliness, forsakeness (17+27+38)	94	25	3
2	Play and other acitivities (09)	38	16	33
3	Life in school (34)	106	8	6
4	Death (54+55)	8	18	32
5	Conflicts (23+31)	43	12	6
6	Bullying, being teased (32)	24	17	7
7	War and international conflicts (62)	6	25	16
8	Fear, sorrow/general (15)	33	19	2
9	Being given presents/bithdays (05)	18	12	17
10	The future, growing up (20+19)	7	26	5
11	How the natural world functions (46)	49	17	0
12	Happiness, security (18+28+39)	17	0	33
13	Literature, TV, language, music (43+53)	49	1	1
14	Being given a pet (06)	6	1	17
15	How everything started (52)	25	16	0
16	Technology (42)	42	3	0
17	The universe (51)	23	8	0
Number of pupils		127	106	150

Many children mention death and war, not infrequently as examples of something one thinks about when one is unhappy. This is a sign that more "formulated" problem themes are starting to turn up in the lower-school material. The question of the origin of everything

is another recurring example of this type of reflection. The future and the universe are two further themes that many lower-school children have brought to the fore. All these more or less difficult and weighty questions are brought up side-by-side with themes that reflect what is everyday and outward-looking in play and activities, in school life and in dreams of presents and surprises. There are also several questions on how nature functions, on things read, or seen on television, and on technical things. The family is mentioned by many as the firm basis for happiness and security.

From Table 6 below one can also understand just how dependent the children´s answers are on the investigation procedure. In the three different investigations represented in the table, we have placed the emphasis on different things in the questions the children had to answer. The first material from the interview study allowed much room for life in school and for things one wanted to know more about. The second set of material consists of sentence completion items with a more thoughtful and reflective accent. The third set concerns things one thinks about when one is happy and when one is unhappy. These differences are clearly noticeable in the table.

Ask a silly question and you get a silly answer, as the saying goes. Let us discuss the matter of whether the children´s answers were, quite simply, prompted by the investigation procedures we followed. I think not. The guidance we used was chiefly aimed at bringing out certain moods, not definite problem areas. The variation in the children´s answers indicates, rather, that answers were in fact available. Children have experienced the moods we brought out in the investigations, and they link them with certain problem areas that they know well. The frequencies in the tables have one property that indicates that this is really the case. The majority of themes are represented in all three sets of investigation material, and in this way, they cover each other. In the children´s oral answers and in their writing it is only the emphasis that has been displaced following the variations in our way of asking. This shows that within the children themselves there is already a broad range of reflections about existence and the world around them.

I have already noted that the children´s perspectives on life widen with age. This observation is confirmed by the results in Table 6, where the themes occurring most frequently in the middle-school pupils´ texts are ranked. The international element is relatively important in these pupils´ answers. Here, questions about justice between rich and poor have been added to the themes occurring among the lower-school children. Now also questions about relations between boys and girls, and about the development of one´s own body, enter the picture. The 6th-year pupils, in particular, give much space to these themes. Texts about sport of different kinds are at this age nearly as common as writings about play and other activities. Socially-organised games are thus beginning to overtake free unorganised play, at least in the children´s reflections.

Problems and questions concerning the rapidly-growing self, the relationship to friends - which seems increasingly to be taking over the role of the family as chief existential reference point - and then the wide world, all these are represented in the middle-school material. Indirectly, this also mirrors the children´s social situation. If teenagers can be said to stand at the threshold of adult life, then middle-school children stand at the threshold of youth culture.

The inceased ability to formulate the themes as problems is noticeable partly through questions about guilt being fairly common among this age group. But this is also true for the middle-school children´s formulations regarding other subject areas. In general one encounters fairly often in the middle-school material existential themes formulated in the ways normally associated with the so-called large questions. In other words, the degree of abstraction has been raised but the texts still bear the imprint of things experienced personally. Not that the children have really experienced war, death and international injustice, but their questions on these themes are based directly on their own commitment to such issues. The abstraction does not yet seem to have led to any greater distancing with regard to the problem.

Table 6.

Ranking of the most frequently occurring theme in middle-school children's answers taken from two sets of investigation material: II. Texts from two sentence-completion tasks for eliciting what children think about. III. Texts from two sentence-completion tasks on the theme happy/unhappy. (43)

Ranking	*Content category (Code no.)*	*Comparison figures* II	III
1	Loneliness, forsakenness (17+27+38)	42	7
2	War and international conflicts (52)	24	25
3	Death (54+55)	14	31
4	Play and other activities (09)	7	37
5	Guilt (16+26+37+41)	37	4
6	Conflicts (21+31)	30	5
7	Sports (10)	13	21
8	Togetherness, happiness (18+28+39)	4	29
9	Bullying (32)	26	6
10	Injustice, rich-poor, starvation nationally-internationally (25+36+58+63)	18	13
11	Boy/girl relationships (33)	21	6
12	Being given things, birthdays (05)	11	11
13	Life at school (34)	10	11
14	The future, growing up (20+19)	16	4
15	Development of my own body, identity (48)	16	2
Number of pupils		377	575

The foregoing brief account shows that children´s questions always have a context. They reflect the children´s life situations. Children try to form for themselves an understanding of their lives, and their questions take on direction. In certain parts of the investigation material one can note an endeavour to find, through the questions, a meaning to one´s existence. This brings us to the phenomenon of a personal world view.

Examples of the interplay between existential questions and a personal world view

When in an earlier chapter I gave an account of the concepts existential question and personal world view, I assumed that there was an internal connection and an interplay between them. In parts of the investigation material, I have, I think, support for this assumption. I give examples below, and shall then in my analysis of the texts make use of the concepts in the model on page 23.

When one asks a child to write on the theme "What is a human being, and what is a human being like?", one is approaching that part of his personal world view that is concerned with his conception of man. Childrens´ conceptions of the world are met in what they can relate about human biology, psychology, social life and the like. Their conviction is mirrored among other things in their assessment of man´s character and his prospects for the future. Value-judgments concerning what is right and wrong, good and evil, abound, sometimes even with suggestions for programmes of actions. Against these components of the personal world view, existential questions are often set. One then notices that it is not only the existential questions that elicit the content of a world view: the reverse seems to happen just as often.

Such an interplay between existential questions and a personal world view can be seen in the following examples, but one can also note trains of thought that can be assigned to different components in the author´s personal world view.

> What is a human being, and what is it like?
>
> A human is a monkey without a tail and not so much hair, and then we can talk, though some people are elitrate and I think that´s a pity. At our school some of them are tough sort of, but I think under their tough, hard shells they are all kind.
>
> It doesn´t matter that some are black or white or yellowish ect. A human being can be kind, stupid, tall, short, joyful, sorrowing, happy, miserable etc. But they

don´t all live in the same way, some are poor and some are rich so I think, we´re rich, we should also share things a bit more than we do. In our country we can get help when we are sick, but people in the poor countries sometimes can´t get any help. We can read and write and do sums and so on. But poor people mostly dont know anything. It is good that we adopt, but we shouldn´t only adopt very small children, we should also adopt older ones because they need it just as much. Some people live in huts but we live in houses, but some people do not even have a hut. It´s stupid but we have the Palm Sunday collection and "collect" in Church. I hope it will be better in the near future.

In some countries (Soviet etc) they do not have freedom of thought. Then you cannot think what you want to, this is stupid. But we can in Sweden (fortunately). I wonder if its true that there will be an ice age in 100,000 years or more but then we shall be dead. I wonder what it´s like to be dead and why people get divorced. If there is a God, what does he look like. Why do many people smoke, take drugs, sniff meths and drink a lot. It´s really stupid. Some people can speak many languages and some only their own. Everybody should be able to learn to read and write, count, draw and to speak lots of languages. Why do foreigners get bullied? They´ve got just as much right to be here, or else we shouldn´t be allowed to go abroad. I read in the paper that someone or some people had seen a flying saucer. Can this be true. In that case, what do the beings look like? I hope for improvement, that all the countries will make peace. This must be. I hope, I hope, I hope!

Girl, aged 12

In this fairly long essay by a twelve-year-old girl there are parts that correspond well with different aspects of a personal world view. Her conception of the world is given much space in her text. This is common when my essay material is considered as a whole. As this girl does, the children often present a good deal of knowledge about mankind, its origins and biology and about its ways of functioning intellectually, affectively, socially and politically. Not least, the variation between different individuals and societies is stressed. On the other hand, such clearly formulated expressions of conviction as this one are far from common. The whole of this essay is marked by a faith in human equality and a democratic conception of society. There is also the earnest wish for "improvement, that all the countries will make peace. This must be. I hope, I hope I hope".

There is a clear link between the conception of the world, conviction and the value-judgments the girl expresses. She knows that there are illiterates, injustices, political oppression and oppression of one´s schoolmates; and she considers these things stupid and unfair. These value-judgments lead on to a need for action. The programme of action she imagines appears to be that people should share what they have, economically and in other ways; that everyone should learn a lot, and that people should work for peace.

When the writer sets about the job of describing her conception of man, one notices how a number of difficulties of an existential character present themselves. Here also an interplay arises between existential questions and elements of a world view.

The long time-perspective of 100,000 years highlights the question of what it is like to be dead. Bordering on this question lie, as so often, questions about God. One hard existential question leads to others about divorce and drug abuse. The rendering of what man can learn leads on to the question "why do foreigners get bullied?" The implicit question is: Why doesn´t everybody agree that bullying is unfair?

It is essential to bear in mind that not all existential questions take the form of - questions. Several are implicit or hinted at when the writer raises a number of social circumstances and juxtaposes them. "We can read and write and do sums and so on. But poor people mostly dont know anything ... we live in houses but some people do not even have a hut ... in some countries ... you cannot think what you want to. But we can ..."

Despite the essay´s length, it is by no means an exhaustive picture we get of the writer´s conception of man, even less of her personal world view. Yet the essay has a depth that shows how complex a personal world view, including that of a 12-year-old, can be.

In its entirety this essay demonstrates that it is not only a matter of existential questions receiving "answers" through different

elements of a personal world view, which is what I earlier termed the context and intentionality of existential questions. It is also that the things one believes one knows by virtue of one´s conviction or one´s knowledge of a conception of the world give birth to new questions or deepen those that have already been formulated. This is the way the dynamic field between existential questions and a personal world view is made plain.

Several existential questions also occur in the children´s essays on the theme "Once when I was thinking about God". A review of the existential questions, apart from the purely religious ones, occurring in the material tells us a good deal about the status and content, in their world views, of belief in God. Content analysis of the material indicates that the following existential themes are the ones most often raised in connection with the children´s writing about God:

1. How everything started
2. Death
3. Illness and accidents
4. War, famine and disasters

Taken together, these themes give the contours of an image of God. The existential themes many children relate to their possible belief or non-belief in God are of the nature of fate. It is the God of Fate, He who rules life and death, the beginning and the end, who appéars in the texts of many pupils. "Something must lie behind the beginning of everything, something behind the end, could it be some kind of god? Things happen in far-off countries, children starve, people are killed in wars: whose fault is it? If there were a God, it would be His fault". The classic problem of theodicy, the question of how a good and omnipotent God is reconcilable with all the suffering in the world, is not only something that engages theologians and philosophers: the problem can be a very vital one for middle-school pupils, believers and non-believers alike.

One obvious thing is that the majority of the more commonplace

existential questions predominating in the rest of our material are so relatively rare in the children´s essays. I am thinking here of the questions that concern home, school, mates and one´s own "I". The god most of the children think of when asked is thus not an everyday god. Those questions of existence that are most commonplace seem to have little to do with children´s religious conceptions. This may say something about the status of religion in secularised Sweden. Whatever remains of Christian ideas one meets in most people´s personal world views appears to be fragments of belief in some kind of God of Fate.

> I suppose I´ve thought about God lots of times, but I don´t remember. I have also asked myself many times who it was that created the world. And then I´ve mostly got the answer God. But how? When? Yes, you will probably never get a true answer to these questions.
>
> This is probarly why you asked us what we believe and think about god (I suppose). From some you´ll get the same answers from them because it´s the teachers and the parents that din into the kids that this is how it is, God is pretty old he has a long white beard and lives up in heven. Really, do they think he floats around up there on a cloud and looks like some ancheint old grandfather? NO! I think he just is. But then why would he let 100,000 people starve and let hundreds of thousands be millionaires at the same time.
>
> Now don´t go and think I don´t believe in him because I do (nearly) and (sometimes) but I don´t set much store by bibles and so on.
>
> This is what I think about God.
>
> End.

This essay was written by an 11-year-old girl. Her father was a salesman at the time and the family lived in a smallish town in central Sweden.

It is striking how careful the girl is to separate her own personal world view ("This is what I think about God") from doctrines or world view traditions ("bibles" and "the teachers and the parents that din into the kids that this is how it is").

Her own conviction about God testifies to a quite advanced picture of God: "I think he just is." This formulation, moreover, has clear parallels within Jewish/Christian tradition where God is spoken of as "the Being of beings" or in the formula "I am that I am".

This conviction brings the girl up against certain elements of her conception of the world, where 100,000 starving people are set against 100,000 millionaires. Implicit here is the girl´s value-judgment that this is unjust. Here she raises an existential question about God and evil.

Throughout the text one can follow an interplay between existential questions and conceivable answers of the conviction type. One can also note how "the answers" make the questions more profound rather than erasing them.

I have now attempted to describe the interplay that arises between existential questions and a personal world view when a person reflects upon the fundamental conditions of human life. The glimpses we have had into these children´s worlds of ideas are of course too fragmentary for us to know whether we have found something that is true for all children. In the youngest, it is surely true that direct expressions of a world view do not occur so often as in older children. The little ones have not been able to collect so many "answers" through their conception of the world, or in the form of a conviction. Yet we have been able to establish that the existential questions are there as a starting point.

In my opinion, we find in schoolchildren enough examples of a clear link between existential questions and different expressions of a personal world view for it to be meaningful to place children´s questioning in the larger perspective.

One last point to note here. The investigation procedure itself may frequently have caused reflections over this very interplay between existential questions and components of a personal world view. In

the following essay, we see how the task of describing what a human being is, leads the writer on to fundamental questions about existence and his own identity, peace, and differences between people. Reading the essay slowly, one feels something of the breathing or the rhythm that punctuates the writer´s train of thought.

> A person is tremendsly complicated I think. Its so kind of strange. I´ve got two legs two arms. For example if you sit looking at a hand. A lot of people are kind to each other. A lot of people are unkind to each other. If I had a wish Id wish for there to be peace on earth for ever. Everyone everyone in the whole world is difrent. Everyone has different noses and ears and legs and everything is diffrent.
>
> Boy, aged 9

Fragments of a personal world view

Can one really expect to find a personal world view in children? It naturally depends on what one means, and on how old the children are. But so much is clear: that even children of six can formulate existential questions of relevance for the development of a personal world view; and that children, earlier than many people think, systematise their conviction, their conception of the world and their value-judgments into some form of complete entity.

Our interest studies included traditional attitude questions concerning democracy, the conception of man, belief in God and the like. The results showed that children at the ages of 9 to 13 can have clear views on these matters. The results were confirmed by the content analyses we made of the pupil essays that contained thoughts about mankind and God.

The investigation material shows that there occur at least fragments of what we have termed a personal world view in children before the age of ten. This is true at least of three aspects of a personal world view, namely the conception of society, the conception of man and the conception of God. The study of these phenomena is important, for it affords valuable knowledge of children and

of their life situations.

Children do not only formulate existential questions, they also develop a personal world view which makes them query the things they experience in their surroundings. I shall attempt to illustrate this with some examples. Unfortunately, space makes it difficult to give an overall picture of the process we are concerned with here.

Judging from the interest investigations and the essay material, there is among schoolchildren great commitment to questions relating to fundamental political value-judgments. Political organisational forms, however, are treated somewhat seldom in the essays.

This is actually quite remarkable since it emerged from the essay study that the pupils found formulating their knowledge about man considerably easier than formulating their belief in and about man: their concepts of reality seemed to have a better language basis than their conviction. They could write much and well about the circulation of the blood, nerve endings and the functioning of the senses, but found it significantly more difficult to find words for describing the more ideological aspects of their conception of man. It seems as if the pupils lacked terms for this side of things. Regarding the social aspects, the case seemed in some respects to be the opposite.

Not much was written in the children´s essays about how society functions. Society´s equivalents of blood vessels, lungs and nerve endings are not often mentioned in the texts. As opposed to this, remarkably many express a conviction regarding how society ought to be organised. Despite the fact that, as in the case of conceptions of man, there is often a lack of relevant terms, they manage nevertheless to formulate their positions in efficient ways. An example:

> A human being is an animal of great intelligence. It is not born with defensive weapons like other animals have, eg horns, claws and teeth. It uses its brain and makes weapons to defend itself with. Our development has gone tremendously fast the last few years. Most people are selfish, once they have got a lot of something they want

more of the same goods. For instance in Sweden we have food to eat we have the chance to be educated. But in other countries they don´t, so not everybody gets food and teaching there like I get. Why is this I´ll tell you. The people that got a lot, most of them got more, too. But it was not like that with all the people who were poor, they got poorer when the rich people wanted more. Then the rich took from the poor and in this way many wrongs have been committed.

Boy, aged 12

The resentment over the injustices in the world that emerged from parts of the interest studies is also evident in the foregoing essay by a twelve-year-old. Among other things it is seen in the relatively high degree of abstraction and the fact that he tries to explain why things in society are as they are. In this way he also gives us a glimpse into part of his world view. It appears to be organised something like this: his conviction tells him that most people are selfish. His conception of the world includes his knowledge of the differences between countries and of the importance of food and education. The crucial point is that he has discovered that the rich always want more, and that this makes the poor even poorer. His underlying value judgment is that this is unfair.

When a conception of man is included in a philosophical system of thought it usually contains at least three components: a description of human nature, an explanation and a normative part stating what mankind ought to be like.

Both the interest investigations and the essay investigations have shown that children do have thoughts such as this. They often report a relatively pessimistic conception of man and sometimes also of the future. Particularly the older children, however, try to qualify their descriptions of man. Yet even a ten-year-old can formulate a conception of man with all the three components required of a philosophically formulated conception.

A human being is a large figure on two legs. It can be kind, sad, naughty, angry, cheeky. I wish they were kind and thoughtful but you have to be sad or angry sometimes. I think that if all the people could be at peace then most things would be fine, but humans can get ill so their brains are spoilt for example Idi Amin kills

people every day, I think such things are terrible! To end I would like to say that the best thing about the human being is love.

There are many things that make people different from other beings. I think the most important things are: cleverness and wisdom, learning. But one thing is silly that we dont have tails to wave away flies with.

Boy aged 10

Turning to children´s religious convictions, our latest, 1979, interest investigation showed that some 20-30% of the children were convinced that God exists. Rather more, 30-40%, were convinced that God does not exist. The largest group, about 40-70%, noted that they did know what to believe about God.

The number of believers also sank somewhat with age. An important observation, however, is that this change leads chiefly to an increase in the number of doubters. Among the girls, too, the numbers who were sure that they did not believe also sank, while the doubters increased.

Doubt is not, therefore, a typical attribute of the teens. Childhood doubt is commoner than childhood faith. If one is to point to any particular transition period for children´s religious development, eleven to twelve years seems to be one such.

The phrase "belief in God" is, however, ambiguous. Many pupils write that they do not believe in God and that they are not at all religious, yet they write about how they think of God, pray to God or count God as some kind of explanation of the world. It is as if many felt a need to defend a personal integrity against a religious package deal they felt to be unreasonable in many respects. Or - if you will - they try to develop their personal world views regarding religion, as other things, without being collectively affiliated to the religious sheepfold. It is conceivable that this may also be explained by religious tradition landing, so to say, in the children´s fields of tension between belief and knowledge, between their convictions and their concepts of reality. This tension is built-in in many children´s thinking about religous matters.

Believing "sort of" or "in between" becomes a designation many children make use of to convey their personal world view in religious matters. Our attitude figures can possibly be interpreted to mean that this position is also the one that is most common among children. The following example shows how a twelve-year-old girl develops this theological position in a very personal way.

> I think God is necessary for some people. Who God really is, you don´t know, but anyway many people think they feel safer when they pray to God. Suppose you divided the people in Sweden (not only in Sweden) into three groups. There are some who definately believe in God and Jesus and then there are some who are in between believing "definately" or not believing. This group is for those who dont believe in God and Jesus. I myself am in between. Sometimes perhaps you think a lot about God and sometimes you don´t think about it at all. You shouldn´t be down on people who think different to you. I think people should think as they want to. I believe God is everywhere, more or less. Many people are having a difficult time and then he is with them. You often think nothing terrible can happen to just you. God has great power and can help lots of people but many feel he isn´t thinking of them. They think everything is so difficult.
>
> There probably was a Jesus, but it is difficult to say who he is. I´m in church quite a lot because I sing in a choir and then I mostly listen to the sermon. I don´t understand everything the vicar says, but I think about the parts I understand. God cannot take away all the evil if we don´t help too.
>
> End.
>
> Girl, aged 12

It is not only the children who believe "in between" that have carried out critical examinations and personal processing of religious world view material. There are many fine examples of how the same process goes on in children who have reached some conviction that has made them reject the world of religious concepts. The reasons for their rejection vary. It can be a matter of rational analysis of the content of truth in the religious assertions they have encountered in various circumstances, or it can be deeply-felt personal experiences that have led them to assume the same posture.

When I was in first year, I praid to god then.

I believed in god.

But now I´ve begun to realise lots of things. Like when my gran died she screamed and said that god hasnt helped me so I have to die. She was only 63.

Then I started to understand things. God never helps you I found out. And from that day I stopped believing in god.

Girl, aged 11

In both these essays one sees how personal experience, the writers´ development levels and their knowledge play a large part in the presentation. Their conviction regarding faith in God is set against their conception of the world. In the first essay a number of clearly formulated value-judgments are also reported. In both, a readiness to act is clearly stated. One notices also that the level of awareness is relatively high. The writers know what they believe, and why. The writers are also struggling to achieve a well-balanced integration of the different elements in their personal world views.

Commentary

The loneliness and exposure that seem to mark the lives of many children is what, perhaps, remains most firmly in the memory when one has worked for a time on these children´s texts. A literary account of childhood easily acquires a distant and melancholy shimmer. These children´s own texts seldom show distance, which is why they seem so much more effective. They recount their experience openly and straightforwardly. Through their dependence and defencelessness, children have always had a difficult time; but one would have hoped that the Welfare State would have offered children a brighter life.

The children´s proximity to what is difficult and painful is not only evident when they treat their own circumstances. When they write about the state of the world, about destruction of the environment, war and famine, one is often affected by the very absence of the remote word flow that experts and other adults usually use for

describing what is frightful. In the children´s texts, one encounters plain speaking. A few lines laboriously put down, concrete and unadorned, can tell us how bad things really are.

To be allowed to share children´s reflections has sometimes been to view the world anew with fresh eyes, free from the resignation and indifference of the adult world. Then the dark sides in the children´s pictures of the world easily dominate when, as an adult, one is to try and render them. One could have wished their experience of life to have been gentler and their world pictures brighter. Children should be children, we say - and then they insist on seeing the world as it is. Children´s own clarity of vision stands in pitiless contrast to the darknesses they observe.

Though the dark colours seem to come out more clearly in the children´s pictures of the world than in the adults´, the same thing is true of the bright sides of life: the endless freedom of the summer holidays, the zest for life, the friends, appetite, horses and football. How we wish that that was the whole truth and nothing but the truth about the world of childhood.

ON RESEARCH IN NEIGHBOURING AREAS

When I began work on the series of investigations presented in this thesis, educational psychology and development psychology were dominated by the cognitive-psychological perspective. The same was true of religious education. Ronald Goldman (1964, 1965) applied Piaget´s theory of stages in the development of thinking ability to the ability to assimilate the world of religious concepts. Though this may be considered a paradox, presumably it was the great interest of those years in how children think that made me come to study what children think.

For the realisation of the significance of cognitive development for children´s ability to handle abstract subject matter led on to a didactic conclusion - the crucial problem of religious teaching is to make abstract subject matter concrete for pupils who often think in concrete terms. This making concrete means trying to relate the subject matter to something well known, something the pupils have experienced themselves. It then becomes necessary to know something of what children think about (Westling & Pettersson 1973, Westling et al. 1973).

While this entailed my research design being influenced by cognitive-psychological ways of looking at things, it also meant that a number of English interest studies in fact had the greatest influence on my investigations (Alves 1968, Cox 1967, Daines 1966, Loukes 1961, 1965).

Some of the Continental research on children and religion also influenced my studies since their studies did not focus on the form children´s conceptions take, but on the content (Babin 1965, Deconchy 1965, Godin 1971, Thun 1959, 1963).

A number of studies within recent child psychology research have points of contact with my own area, but in general their problems

are approached from a cognitive-psychological perspective, as witness all the studies devoted to children´s moral development and conceptions of reality. In the latter field, there are, among other things, studies of children´s conceptions of life and death, of society, of politics and politicians, of technology and work. Many references could be given: I shall limit myself to a few: (Kohlberg 1969, Bergling 1981, Oser and Gmünder 1984, Furth 1980, Lystad 1974, Greenstein 1985, Goldstein & Oldham 1979).

Within teaching theory and psychology there are also examples of researchers who have stressed the importance of describing the contents of children´s worlds of ideas and not only the forms. Studying the ecology of human development, researchers have addressed the connection between the child´s total life situation and the child´s development. Here the focus is not only on psychological processes but also on their actual contents. (Andersson 1982, Bronfenbrenner 1979). Similar interest in the actual contents of e.g. various learning and study processes is shown by a group of Swedish researchers working under the heading phenomenography (Marton & Wennerstam 1984). Here, there may be ways of working that could be developed for possible further study of children´s philosophy of life.

Concentrating on the content aspect of children´s philosophy of life, one soon becomes aware of having much to learn from research that deals with this by tradition. My dependence on research in religious philosophy has already become clear (Jeffner 1973, Holte 1984). This experience has shown that there is much to gain from the interdisciplinary view when one is engaged in this kind of research.

Didactical research in Germany is perhaps an example of such an interdisciplinary meeting between education and other subjects. German didactics in religious education are based on a long tradition where theological and philosophical aspects are balanced with educational and psychological aspects. (Nipkow 1984, Religionspädagogik 1983, Lee 1985). For anyone wishing to continue developing the theoretical aspects I have raised in connection with the concepts existential question and personal world view, I believe

there is much to gain from these two Continental traditions.

The last few years have brought a good deal of research with interesting parallels to my own, even though it has been in other fields and not always with children as the subject of study. I am thinking here of studies within history, ethnology and philosophy aiming to chart and analyse what may be termed the common man´s world picture or philosophy of life: studies of past or present subcultures. Using different kinds of source material, attempts are made to reconstruct the world picture that characterised the thinking and way of life in the particular circumstances being analysed (Frykman & Löfgren 1979, Gaunt 1983, Matthews 1982).

I suspect that there are links between this research and the particular historical research in the Continent known as the "Anales school". (Le Roy Ladurie 1975, Zemon Davis 1982). One might say that all these studies are touched by the ambition to discover and write "forgotten history". It may be that children´s life situations and philosophy of life represent such a forgotten part of our culture.

Sociology offers many avenues of possible interest in this connection. One such is the broad field of attitude research, where the attitude concept itself is definitionally near the concept of personal world view as I understand it. To give just one example: within this area of sociology one can place the many studies of teenagers´ outlooks on the future.

Another avenue here would be the research directed at studying what are termed basic values. In my view, these studies go deeper than most attitude investigations. They also show clear points of contact with my discussion concerning the concept personal world view. (Rokeach 1973, Feather 1975).

A further area of sociology which I feel has been fruitful is analysis of the fundamental conditions of children´s life situations. Having myself maintained that children´s thoughts can be considered as reflections on the experiences they undergo in their

particular life situations, I view the results obtained through this research as specially valuable. (Raundalen 1979, Bjurman 1981).

Lastly, I have found several useful perspectives within social anthropological research. Here there are studies of the ways children are viewed in different cultures - what is expected of children at different ages, what roles are allocated to children, how are they estimated? There are also studies of children´s ways of thinking related to the specific culture in which they are growing up. These studies enable us bring constructive nuances to parts of cognitive-psychological research. (Barn i tid och rum 1984).

When one considers the various components of my working model (Fig. 2, page 23), one sees that practically all are illustrated by particular areas of research. One wonders what consequences increased specialisation within different research fields has had for the picture science has given of mankind, and specially of children. Is it conceivable that an overall picture of the child exists, but has been lost as a consequence of specialisation?

Throughout the studies summarised earlier, I have sought just some kind of overall picture of children and their philosophy of life. The examples of broad interdisciplinary approaches I have met in the literature have thus been specially interesting. It remains to be seen whether it will be possible to fulfill all the parts of the research programme that extension of my working model indicates, and whether it is correct to speak of children´s existential questions and personal world views in the ways posited by the model. Even the beginning reported here has, I feel, been so fruitful that it is well worth continuing.

NOTES

1. Three consecutive research projects have provided the material for this thesis, the UMRe project (Teaching Methods in Religious Education), the BaLi project (Children and Ideology) and the UBOL project (Development of Children´s Philosophy of Life). The first two were financed by the National Board of Education and the third by the Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

2. This is clear from Karl-Göran Algotsson´s analysis of the political debate concerning religious teaching in schools during the twentieth century. Cf. Algotsson, K.-G. Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet, 1975.

3. Using computers, a large-scale project has been started to enter personal details from the old parish registers into a demographic database. This comprehensive work has already afforded material for interesting studies. Se Johansson, E. Kyrkböckerna berättar, 1983 and Selander, S.A. Livslångt lärande i den svenska kyrkoförsamlingen, Fleminge 1820-1890.

4. Our translation from Swedish. Luthers lilla och stora katekes has been included since 1593 in the confessional literature of the Church of Sweden.

5. Selander, S.A. op. cit. pp 20-26.

6. See Tingsten, H. Gud och fosterlandet. 1969.

7. This information is taken from Dahlbom, F. Den svenska folkskolans kristendomsundervisning 1842-1919. 1927, p. 263. See also Andersson, N. 1878 års katekes. Debatten om katekesens form och innehåll 1810-1878. 1973.

8. A general account of religious education in the Nordic countries is given in The Rise of Neo-religiosity. 1980. For information on the development of secularisation the reader is referred to Gustafsson, G. Religiös förändring i norden 1930-1980. 1985.

9. Our translation. Läroplan för grundskolan 1962. p 217.

10. A very full account of the public debate during this period is given in Algotsson, K.-G. Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet, 1975. For pupil attitudes, I refer to Hartman, S.G. Eleverna och skolans religionsundervisning. 1971.

11. In a work with the theme "With proper concern" a number of authors outlined ideas behind the new educational model. Their consequences for school and church teaching were also discussed. The theme was to be seen as a summary of how the demand for objectivity was to be interpreted. See Med engagemang och

saklighet, Ronnås, J. and Svärd, S. (Ed.) 1970.

12. For my discussion of typical features in American progressivism, the reader is referred to Cremin, L.A. The Transformation of the School. 1964. For progressivism in Sweden see the Introduction to Dewey, J. Individ, skola och samhälle. Pedagogiska texter av John Dewey. 1980.

13. Dewey, J. My Pedagogic Creed. 1897, 1959, p. 30.

14. Dewey, J. Religion and our Schools. 1908, 1940, p. 85.

15. I believe the strong emphasis on democracy of the 1946 Schools Commission can be seen in this light. This commission set the ideological-educational tone for all Swedish school reforms after the second World War (SOU 1948:27). It may have been similar reasons that led England at the end of the second World War to legislate on the introduction of general religious instruction. With the 1944 Education Act, Religious Education in fact became the only compulsory subject in the English school system. This may have contributed to the great influence of English religious teaching theory in Sweden during the 60´s and 70´s. The basic conditions, and thus the problems, were similar. See Niblett, W.R. The religious Clauses of the 1944 Act. 1966. Sealey, J.A. Religion in Schools, Philosophical examination, 1982, p. 20.

16. Dewey, J. My Pedagogic Creed. 1897, 1959, p. 27.

17. See Algötsson, K.-G. Från katekestvång till religionsfrihet. 1975.

18. In connection with the 1969 Schools Curriculum, an interest investigation was carried out among teenagers. A further investigation was made for the 1980 curriculum. These were entitled Tonåringen och livsfrågorna, 1969, and Tonåringen och livet. Undersökning och diskussion kring tonåringen och livsfrågorna, 1980.

19. Dewey, J. My Pedagogic Creed. 1897, 1959, p. 28.

20. A fuller account of my considerations concerning the definition of concepts will be found in a special report. See Hartman, S.G. and Pettersson, S. Livsfrågor och livsåskådning hos barn. 1980.

21. Läroplan för grundskolan 1969. pp. 217, 176.

22. See the argument in Dewey, J. The Child and the Curriculum. 1902.

23. I have firmly maintained that the question of <u>what</u> children think about is more interesting than <u>how</u> they <u>think</u>. This is true at least for the areas I have <u>studied</u>. This does not imply that the formal aspects associated with children´s cognitive development lack significance for their existential questions.

24. This illustrates an important difference of principle between our concept "existential question" and the linguistically close "life theme" used within English religious educational theory. In connection with Ronald Goldman´s research, teaching material concerning life themes was developed to build up fundamental concept formation for better cognitive understanding of the world of religious ideas. Hardly any space was given to existential dimensions here.

25. See Holte, R. Människa Livstolkning Gudstro. 1982. p. 24. The religious philosopher Sealey suggests "life stance" as a translation of the Swedish "livsåskådning". To my way of thinking, this translation smacks too much of postural gymnastics. See Sealey, J.A. Religion in Schools. 1982.

26. The determination of the concept personal world view I propose here is influenced by a tentative definition of the term "livsåskådning" given by the religious philosopher Anders Jeffner. Our translation of his definition runs:

> By a person´s world view (livsåskådning) is meant the person´s central value system and his basic postural attitude plus the part of what he considers he knows about himself and his surroundings that affects his central value system and his basic postural attitude in a way that he is prepared to accept.

Jeffner, A. Livsåskådningsforskning. Förslag och diskussion av erfarenheter från projektarbetet. Forskningsrapport nr 7 från projektet Livsåskådningar i det moderna samhället. Uppsala University. 1973.

My own definition of the concept differs chiefly in the third stage, where I prefer readiness for action as a component. I have instead treated Jeffner´s basic postural attitude as a psychological variable which affects the shaping of the world view without being part of it.

27. See Hartman, S.G. Barns tankar om livet. 1986. I shall try to summarise parts of this book in a later chapter, but it will be difficult since the whole book is an attempt to summarise characteristics in several very comprehensive sets of examination material concerning children´s world views in different ways.

28. Similar objections have been raised to Anders Jeffner´s work on religious-philosophical analyses of different traditions and belief systems. See Persson, P.E. Vägar till teologin. 1982 and Hägglund, B. Erfarenheten som kriterium i dogmatiken. 1982.

29. Taken from a work by Jerome Bruner. See Bruner, J.S. Beyond the Information Given. Studies in the psychology of knowing. 1974.

30. John A. Sealey queries whether the distinction between teach-

ing religion and teaching about religion is at all meaningful. Regulations regarding teaching about religion, would, he says, as would subject integration and moral elements in the teaching, lead the pupils away from what religious education should really concentrate on.

31. Each of the investigations was reported wholly or in part some time after being carried out. I refer to the reports at the same time as I summarise them. Limited space precludes a full account of all the investigation techniques used: they are described in the works to which I refer. Regarding two of the reports, I was neither author nor co-author, but was project leader responsible for the design of the investigations, and then supervisor of the students who carried out the reporting.

32. This was my degree project for the licenciate degree. Hartman, S.G. Eleverna och skolans religionsundervisning. En intresseundersökning på grundskolans mellanstadium.

33. The consequences for teaching method were developed in a special report: Westling, G. & Petterson, S. Barn och religionskunskap. En bok om barn och undervisning med utgångspunkt från arbetet i religionskunskap på grundskolans mellanstadium. 1973.

    The project was summarised in the rapport: Westling, G. et al. Sammanställning av några huvudresultat från UMRe-projektets verksamhet. 1973.

34. This investigation was reported in two publications with largely the same contents. Hartman, S.G. and Pettersson, S. Vad funderar barn på? Ett försök att inventera mellanstadieelevers tankar och frågor inför tillvaron och omvärlden. 1972. A year later, a further report was published under the same title. Hartman, S.G., Pettersson, S. & Westling, G. 1973.

35. A taste of the contents of the text material from the investigation is given in Tableau 3. The Table Appendix gives the results of a re-coding of the investigation material.

36. The investigation results were published and interpreted in two publications: BaLi-projektet. Små barn och stora frågor. En probleminventering bland lärare om livsfrågor i förskolan på lågstadiet och på fritidshem. 1975. and Dahlberg, G., Hartman, S.G. & Pettersson, S. Barn och livsfrågor. Lärares erfarenheter från förskola - lågstadium - fritidshem. 1977.

37. Ekström, U. & Odenkrants, J. Livsfrågor och attityder hos barn i åldrarna 9-13 år. 1980.

38. Eklund, U. & Sjöberg, I. Vad barn tänker om Gud. En innehållsanalys av 745 uppsatser skrivna av barn i åldern 9-12 år. 1978.

    The investigation material was later used and analysed in Hartman, S.G. Barns tankar om livet. 1986.

39. Green, I., Rydefalk, I & Hartman, S,G, Vad är en människa? En redovisning av barns människosyn så som den har tagit sig uttryck i uppsatser skrivna av elever i åk 3-6. 1980.

40. Hartman, S.G. Barns tankar om livet. 1986. p 241.

41. BALi-projektet. Vad fundera små barn på? Inventerings-instrument. 1976.

42. The whole of this chapter is based on summaries and quotations from Hartman, S.G. Barns tankar om livet. 1986. I confine myself to a general reference to this work, where the reader wishing for a fuller account of the results and details of the processing and interpretation of the material will find them.

43. The ranking in tables 4 to 6 is based on comparison figures calculated as follows. The number of codings within a category or within a group of combined categories is divided by the numbers of children giving at least one answer. For further information on how the values were calculated, I refer to my Barns tankar om livet (in Swedish).

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TABLE APPENDIX

The three summary tables in the Table Appendix contain the raw values arrived at through quantitive analysis of the investigation material listing children´s thoughts. They are taken from the interview studies and from the second and fourth interest studies.

The tables are based on the Schedule of Categories used in the quantitative content analysis. The Schedule of Categories allows classification of the answers in three ways. The schedule reflects a content aspect, but it also makes it possible to classify the answers as more abstract or less, and as being near the child or less near.

Table A reports the assessment of the children´s answers to seven of the questions asked in the interview study with pre-school children and middle-school children. The questions had the character of "general thoughtfulness". Each child could be coded for several answers to the same queston. Not all answered all the questions.

Table B reports content analysis of the answers to six sentence completion items included in our second, 1970, investigation. The questions were of the type "general thoughtfulness". The children can be coded for several answers to the same item.

Table C contains the results of content analysis of the answers to two sentence completion items that were included in the 1979 interest investigation. The children can be coded for several answers to the same item. The items were worded as follows: "I usually feel this happy/unhappy when I think about ... ".

A SCHEDULE OF CATEGORIES

MAIN HEADING	CONTENT CATEGORY	CODE	ANSWER DISTRIBUTION: PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN B	PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN G	CHILDREN IN SECOND YEAR OF SCHOOL (8-9 YRS) B	CHILDREN IN SECOND YEAR OF SCHOOL (8-9 YRS) G	TOT. B	TOT. G
FREE CONCEPTS	Existential concepts	65		1				1
INTERNATIONAL EVENTS	The future	64						
	Disasters	61			2		2	
	Injustice, famine, rich-poor	63						
	Conflicts, war	62			2	1	2	1
	Other	60			5	2	5	2
			1	1	3	4	4	5
LIFE PROCESSES	Religious life	56	2	5	6	10	8	15
	Death	54+55		5	4	6	4	11
	Identity, my own body, the psyche	48			1	1	1	1
	The beginning of everything	52		1	19	13	19	14
	The universe	51	1	2	20	9	21	11
	Destruction of the environment	47			1		1	
	How the natural world functions	46	9	12	38	24	47	36
	Other	50	1	2	6	6	7	8
SOCIETY	Equality, togetherness, security, harmony	59+49						
	Injustice, rich-poor, unemployment	58	1	1		2	1	3
	Crime, anti-social behaviour, cruelty to animals, conflicts	45+57	1		5	4	6	4
	Accidents, disasters, illness	44		2		2		4
	Literature, film, TV, language, music	43+53	13	26	36	26	49	52
	Technology	42	12	19	36	17	48	36
	Guilt	41			1		1	
	Other	40	7	6	25	19	32	25
FRIENDS/SCHOOL	Togetherness, happiness, security	39		3	7	9	7	12
	Loneliness, forsakenness	38	5	17	43	38	48	55
	Guilt	37				3		3
	Injustice	36			1		1	
	The future, being grown-up	20		2	3	4	3	6
	The future, plans for job, etc.	19			1	1	1	1
	Demands and achievements	35		1	3	1	3	2
	Life at school	34	15	26	77	58	92	84
	Boy/girl relationships	33			1		1	
	Bullying, being teased	32		4	15	16	15	20
	Conflicts	31	3	6	8	25	11	31
	Illness, accidents	30				1		1
	Other	29	3		7	2	10	2
THE FAMILY	Togetherness, happiness, security	28	1	8	2	3	3	11
	Loneliness, forsakenness	27	15	17	15	14	30	31
	Guilt	26				1		1
	Injustice	25		2	2		2	2
	Conflicts between, divorce	24	1	1	1	1	2	2
	Conflicts with	23	8	13	12	10	20	23
	Illness, accidents	22	2	1	4	1	6	2
	Other	21	4	8	6	7	10	15
I-CENTRED	Feelings							
	Happiness, security	18	2			1	2	1
	Loneliness, unrelated feelings	17	1	5	4	5	5	10
	Guilt	16		4	1	3	1	7
	Fear, sorrow	15	12	30	19	23	31	53
	Other	14						
	The body							
	Functioning, pain, illness, accidents	13	6	5	9	9	15	14
	Other	12	3	1	7	1	10	2
	Activities							
	Sporting dreams	11	1				1	
	Sport	10	1	2	12	4	13	6
	Play & other activity	9	22	15	27	21	49	36
	Other	8	2	6	6	2	8	8
	Belongings							
	Being allowed to do something	7	1				1	
	Being given a pet	6	1	10		8	1	18
	Being given things, presents	5	11	10	12	11	23	21
	Other	4		1	1		1	1
OTHER	Fine weather or bad	3		2	2		2	2
	Objects in the immediate surroundings	2	1	2		2	1	4
	Other answers	1	8	6	2		10	6
	Number of themes coded		177	291	520	431	697	722
	Number of children		39	57	66	61	105	118

A SCHEDULE OF CATEGORI S

IN IDING	CONTENT CAT.GORY	CODE	ANSWER DISTRIBUTION PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN		CHILDREN IN SECOND YEAR OF SCHOOL (8-' YRS)		TOT.	
			B	G	B	G	B	G
F CONCEPTS	Existential concepts	65		1				1
ERNATIONAL NTS	The future							
	Disasters	64			2		2	
	Injustice, famine, rich-poor	61						
	Conflicts, war	63			2	1	2	1
	Other	62			5	2	5	2
		60	1	1	3	4	4	5
E PROCESSES	Religious life	56	2	5	6	10	8	15
	Death	54+55		5	4	6	4	11
	Identity, my own body, the psyche	48			1	1	1	1
	The beginning of everything	52		1	19	13	19	14
	The universe	51	1	2	20	9	21	11
	Destruction of the environment	47			1		1	
	How the natural world functions	46	9	12	38	24	47	36
	Other	50	1	2	6	6	7	8
IETY	Equality, togetherness, security, harmony	59+49						
	Injustice, rich-poor, unemployment	58	1	1		2	1	3
	Crime, anti-social behaviour, cruelty to animals, conflicts	45+57	1		5	4	6	4
	Accidents, disasters, illness	44		2		2		4
	Literature, film, TV, language, music	43+53	13	26	36	26	49	52
	Technology	42	12	19	36	17	48	36
	Guilt	41			1		1	
	Other	40	7	6	25	19	32	25
ENDS/SCHOOL	Togetherness, happiness, security	39		3	7	9	7	12
	Loneliness, forsakenness	38	5	17	43	38	48	55
	Guilt	37				3		3
	Injustice	36			1		1	
	The future, being grown-up	20		2	3	4	3	6
	The future, plans for job, etc.	19			1	1	1	1
	Demands and achievements	35		1	3	1	3	2
	Life at school	34	15	26	77	58	92	84
	Boy/girl relationships	33			1		1	
	Bullying, being teased	32		4	15	16	15	20
	Conflicts	31	3	6	8	25	11	31
	Illness, accidents	30				1		1
	Other	29	3		7	2	10	2
FAMILY	Togetherness, happiness, security	28	1	8	2	3	3	11
	Loneliness, forsakenness	27	15	17	15	14	30	31
	Guilt	26				1		1
	Injustice	25		2	2		2	2
	Conflicts between, divorce	24	1	1	1	1	2	2
	Conflicts with	23	8	13	12	10	20	23
	Illness, accidents	22	2	1	4	1	6	2
	Other	21	4	8	6	7	10	15
CENTRED	Feelings							
	Happiness, security	18	2			1	2	1
	Loneliness, unrelated feelings	17	1	5	4	5	5	10
	Guilt	16		4	1	3	1	7
	Fear, sorrow	15	12	30	19	23	31	53
	Other	14						
	The body							
	Functioning, pain, illness, accidents	13	6	5	9	9	15	14
	Other	12	3	1	7	1	10	2
	Activities							
	Sporting dreams	11	1				1	
	Sport	10	1	2	12	4	13	6
	Play & other activity	9	22	15	27	21	49	36
	Other	8	2	6	6	2	8	8
	Belongings							
	Being allowed to do something	7	1				1	
	Being given a pet	6	1	10		8	1	18
	Being given things, presents	5	11	10	12	11	23	21
	Other	4		1	1		1	1
HER	Fine weather or bad	3		2	2		2	2
	Objects in the immediate surroundings	2	1	2		2	1	4
	Other answers	1	8	6	2		10	6
	Number of themes coded		177	291	520	431	697	722
	Number of children		39	57	66	61	105	118

B SHEDULE OF CATEGORIES

MAIN HEADING	CONTENT CATEGORY	CODE	ANSWER DISTRIBUTION 3RD-YR B	3RD-YR G	4TH-YR B	4TH-YR G	5TH-YR B	5TH-YR G	6TH-YR B	6TH-YR G	TOT. B	TOT. G
FREE CONCEPTS	Existential concepts	65	1		1		2	2	5	4	9	6
INTERNATIONAL EVENTS	The future	64		3	2	1	1	2	2	1	5	7
	Disasters	61				1	1			1	1	2
	Injustice, famine, rich-poor	63	3	1	1	3	5	4	8	17	17	25
	Conflicts, war	62	14	12	11	12	17	9	19	22	61	55
	Other	60		3	1	2		2	3	2	4	9
LIFE PROCESSES	Religious life	56	6	2	1	6		3	3	4	10	15
	Death	54+55	13	6	9	10	5	9	11	8	38	33
	Identity, my own body, the psyche	48	2	4	3	11	4	11	12	18	21	44
	The beginning of everything	52	9	8	5	4	5	4	1	5	20	21
	The universe	51	7	2	12	9	5	5	13	2	37	18
	Destruction of the environment	47							1	1	1	1
	How the natural world functions	46	10	8	9	5	10	6	5	9	34	28
	Other	50		1			2				2	1
SOCIETY	Equality, togetherness, security, harmony	59+49							1	2	1	2
	Injustice, rich-poor, unemployment	58			1	1		2	1	4	2	7
	Crime, anti-social behaviour, cruelty to animals, conflicts	45+57	1		3	5	3	3	2	11	9	19
	Accidents, disasters, illness	44			1	1	1	3	1		3	4
	Literature, film, TV, language, music	43+53	1				2	2			3	2
	Technology	42	3		7	5	10	2	3	4	23	11
	Guilt	41	2	2	4	6	1	2	4	6	11	16
	Other	40		2			1				1	2
FRIENDS/SCHOOL	Togetherness, happiness, security	39				3	3	2	1	3	4	8
	Loneliness, forsakenness	38	4	11	11	23	22	22	26	31	63	87
	Guilt	37		1	2	9	2	3	5	5	9	18
	Injustice	36			1	2		1	4		5	3
	The future, being grown-up	20	8	6	12	14	6	7	12	9	38	36
	The future, plans for job, etc.	19	7	7	3	4	6	2	4	1	20	14
	Demands and achievements	35	2	3	6	4	10	10	8	9	26	26
	Life at school	34	3	5	8	8	4	5	7	8	22	26
	Boy/girl relationships	33	1	6	5	12	18	2	20	21	44	41
	Bullying, being teased	32	11	7	19	14	20	13	17	14	67	48
	Conflicts	31			9	11	8	6	8	13	25	30
	Illness, accidents	30			5		1		1	1	7	1
	Other	29	5	1	3	1	3	3	3	2	14	7
THE FAMILY	Togetherness, happiness, security	28			1			1		1	1	2
	Loneliness, forsakenness	27	1	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	6	10
	Guilt	26	1	3	7	10	7	4	9	14	24	31
	Injustice	25	2	1	2	3		4		2	4	10
	Conflicts between, divorce	24	5	3	1	1		7	3	3	9	14
	Conflicts with	23	6	7	4	4	12	10	11	16	33	37
	Illness, accidents	22			4	4			5	4	9	8
	Other	21	1	2	1			1	1	3	3	6
I-CENTRED	Feelings											
	Happiness, security	18	4	6	2	1	2	2		4	8	13
	Loneliness, unrelated feelings	17	2	4	11	3	4	4	10	8	27	19
	Guilt	16	9	11	7	4	10	7	3	6	29	28
	Fear, sorrow	15			2		2			2	4	2
	Other	14										
	The body											
	Functioning, pain, illness, accidents	13	1	1	3	5	3	3	7	3	14	12
	Other	12			1	1		1		2	1	4
	Activities											
	Sporting dreams	11	7	1								
	Sport	10	4	2	6	9	9	6	10	10	7	1
	Play & other activity	9	7	10	10	2	4	1	6	5	29	27
	Other	8									27	18
	Belongings											
	Being allowed to do something	7		1	5	4	5	1				
	Being given a pet	6		1	2	1		1	2	3	10	9
	Being given things, presents	5	7	6	9	7	7	3	9	3	4	6
	Other	4		1	1	1	1			8	32	24
OTHER	Fine weather or bad	3								2	2	4
	Objects in the immediate surroundings	2										
	Other answers	1	4	4	4	5		1	3	2	11	12
	Number of themes coded		18	16	21	15	39	9	28	14	106	54
			192	182	260	270	290	217	320	355	1062	1025
	Number of children		49	56	59	58	65	45	73	77	246	236

B SHEDULE OF CATEGORIES

ING	CONTENT CATEGORY	CODE	ANSWER DISTRIBUTION 3RD-YR B	3RD-YR G	4TH-YR B	4TH-YR G	5TH-YR B	5TH-YR G	6TH-YR B	6TH-YR G	TOT. B	TOT. G
CONCEPTS	Existential concepts	65	1		1		2	2	5	4	9	6
IRNATIONAL TS	The future	64		3	2	1	1	2	2	1	5	7
	Disasters	61				1	1			1	1	2
	Injustice, famine, rich-poor	63	3	1	1	3	5	4	8	17	17	25
	Conflicts, war	62	14	12	11	12	17	9	19	22	61	55
	Other	60		3	1	2		2	3	2	4	9
PROCESSES	Religious life	56	6	2	1	6		3	3	4	10	15
	Death	54+55	13	6	9	10	5	9	11	8	38	33
	Identity, my own body, the psyche	48	2	4	3	11	4	11	12	18	21	44
	The beginning of everything	52	9	8	5	4	5	4	1	5	20	21
	The universe	51	7	2	12	9	5	5	13	2	37	18
	Destruction of the environment	47							1	1	1	1
	How the natural world functions	46	10	8	9	5	10	6	5	9	34	28
	Other	50		1			2				2	1
ETY	Equality, togetherness, security, harmony	59+49							1	2	1	2
	Injustice, rich-poor, unemployment	58			1	1		2	1	4	2	7
	Crime, anti-social behaviour, cruelty to animals, conflicts	45+57	1		3	5	3	3	2	11	9	19
	Accidents, disasters, illness	44			1	1	1	3	1		3	4
	Literature, film, TV, language, music	43+53	1				2	2			3	2
	Technology	42	3		7	5	10	2	3	4	23	11
	Guilt	41	2	2	4	6	1	2	4	6	11	16
	Other	40		2			1				1	2
NDS/SCHOOL	Togetherness, happiness, security	39				3	3	2	1	3	4	8
	Loneliness, forsakenness	38	4	11	11	23	22	22	26	31	63	87
	Guilt	37		1	2	9	2	3	5	5	9	18
	Injustice	36			1	2		1	4		5	3
	The future, being grown-up	20	8	6	12	14	6	7	12	9	38	36
	The future, plans for job, etc.	19	7	7	3	4	6	2	4	1	20	14
	Demands and achievements	35	2	3	6	4	10	10	8	9	26	26
	Life at school	34	3	5	8	8	4	5	7	8	22	26
	Boy/girl relationships	33	1	6	5	12	18	2	20	21	44	41
	Bullying, being teased	32	11	7	19	14	20	13	17	14	67	48
	Conflicts	31			9	11	8	6	8	13	25	30
	Illness, accidents	30			5		1		1	1	7	1
	Other	29	5	1	3	1	3	3	3	2	14	7
AMILY	Togetherness, happiness, security	28			1			1		1	1	2
	Loneliness, forsakenness	27	1	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	6	10
	Guilt	26	1	3	7	10	7	4	9	14	24	31
	Injustice	25	2	1	2	3		4		2	4	10
	Conflicts between, divorce	24	5	3	1	1		7	3	3	9	14
	Conflicts with	23	6	7	4	4	12	10	11	16	33	37
	Illness, accidents	22			4	4			5	4	9	8
	Other	21	1	2	1			1	1	3	3	6
TRED	Feelings											
	Happiness, security	18	4	6	2	1	2	2		4	8	13
	Loneliness, unrelated feelings	17	2	4	11	3	4	4	10	8	27	19
	Guilt	16	9	11	7	4	10	7	3	6	29	28
	Fear, sorrow	15			2		2			2	4	2
	Other	14										
	The body											
	Functioning, pain, illness, accidents	13	1	1	3	5	3	3	7	3	14	12
	Other	12			1	1		1		2	1	4
	Activities											
	Sporting dreams	11	7	1							7	1
	Sport	10	4	2	6	9	9	6	10	10	29	27
	Play & other activity	9	7	10	10	2	4	1	6	5	27	18
	Other	8										
	Belongings											
	Being allowed to do something	7		1	5	4	5	1		3	10	9
	Being given a pet	6		1	2	1		1	2	3	4	6
	Being given things, presents	5	7	6	9	7	7	3	9	8	32	24
	Other	4		1	1	1	1			2	2	4
	Fine weather or bad	3										
	Objects in the immediate surroundings	2	4	4	4	5		1	3	2	11	12
	Other answers	1	18	16	21	15	39	9	28	14	106	54
	Number of themes coded		192	182	260	270	290	217	320	355	1062	1025
	Number of children		49	56	59	58	65	45	73	77	246	236

C SHEDULE OF CATEGORIES

MAIN HEADING	CONTENT CATEGORY	CODE	ANSWER DISTRIBUTION 3RD-YR B	3RD-YR G	4TH-YR B	4TH-YR G	5TH-YR B	5TH-YR G	6TH-YR B	6TH-YR G	TOT. B	TOT. G
FREE CONCEPTS	Existential concepts	65			1					1	1	1
INTERNATIONAL EVENTS	The future	64	1			3	3	3	1	3	5	9
	Disasters	61	1		1	3	2	1		3	4	7
	Injustice, famine, rich-poor	63	1	5	2	7	8	12	8	13	19	37
	Conflicts, war	62	8	16	17	26	25	27	14	35	64	104
	Other	60		1		1	1	1		1	1	4
LIFE PROCESSES	Religious life	56	6	1	2	6	1	3	1	5	10	15
	Death	54+55	19	29	27	47	15	37	15	37	76	150
	Identity, my own body, the psyche	48		2	2	2	1	2	2	3	5	9
	The beginning of everything	52										
	The universe	51										
	Destruction of the environment	47	3	8	4	11	11	11	10	8	28	38
	How the natural world functions	46					1	1	1		2	1
	Other	50	1		1			2		1	2	3
SOCIETY	Equality, togetherness, security, harmony	59+49	3	3	2	7	3	5	4	7	12	22
	Injustice, rich-poor, unemployment	58	2	2	1	2	4	4	3	6	10	14
	Crime, anti-social behaviour, cruelty to animals, conflicts	45+57	2	1		6	4	8	1	9	7	24
	Accidents, disasters, illness	44	1	1		2		1	1	5	2	9
	Literature, film, TV, language, music	43+53	1		2	4	3	2		3	6	9
	Technology	42			1			1		1	1	2
	Guilt	41	1			1		2		1	1	4
	Other	40	1		2	4	1	5	2	8	6	17
FRIENDS/SCHOOL	Togetherness, happiness, security	39	3	11	4	11	5	22	1	18	13	62
	Loneliness, forsakenness	38		2	1	3	3	6	1	6	5	17
	Guilt	37							1		1	
	Injustice	36				1				1		2
	The future, being grown-up	20	2	5	3		3	7	3	5	11	17
	The future, plans for job, etc.	19			1	2	1	2	2	4	4	8
	Demands and achievements	35			6	1	3	8	2	12	11	21
	Life at school	34	2	7	15	7	21	14	11	14	49	42
	Boy/girl relationships	33			2		6	6	6	12	14	18
	Bullying, being teased	32	5	5	6	10	4	6	2	6	17	27
	Conflicts	31	1	3		1	4	4	1	5	6	13
	Illness, accidents	30		1		1						2
	Other	29										
THE FAMILY	Togetherness, happiness, security	28	10	25	9	23	16	13	8	21	43	82
	Loneliness, forsakenness	27	1	2	2	3	3	2	4	1	10	8
	Guilt	26				2	1				1	2
	Injustice	25								1		1
	Conflicts between, divorce	24	2	3	4	4		3	2	5	8	15
	Conflicts with	23	3	3	1	2	4	3		3	8	11
	Illness, accidents	22	1	2	1	3		6	1	5	3	16
	Other	21	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	3	5	9
I-CENTRED	Feelings											
	Happiness, security	18		1		1	3	2	2	7	5	11
	Loneliness, unrelated feelings	17					1	2			1	2
	Guilt	16	4		1	2	3	4		2	8	8
	Fear, sorrow	15		3		2	3		1	2	4	7
	Other	14								1		1
	The body											
	Functioning, pain, illness, accidents	13	5	4	4	3	2	11	3	7	14	25
	Other	12				1						1
	Activities											
	Sporting dreams	11	1		1						2	
	Sport	10	13	9	29	16	23	16	25	14	90	55
	Play & other activity	9	30	19	44	28	44	39	31	27	149	113
	Other	8	1	3	1	3	3	4	6		11	10
	Belongings											
	Being allowed to do something	7	1					1	2	3	3	4
	Being given a pet	6	4	22	3	31	6	24	1	18	14	95
	Being given things, presents	5	12	13	10	7	12	12	12	12	46	44
	Other	4	1	1	2				8	2	11	3
OTHER	Fine weather or bad	3	4	3		2	2	6	1		7	11
	Objects in the immediate surroundings	2	3	1	3	5	3	1		5	9	15
	Other answers	1	12	7	12	8	15	6	20	8	59	25
	Number of themes coded		173	225	232	319	278	359	221	380	904	1283
	Number of children		71	79	90	92	97	91	102	103	360	365

C SHEDULE OF CATEGORIES

MIN HADING	CONTENT CATEGORY	CODE	ANSWER DISTRIBUTION 3RD-YR B	3RD-YR G	4TH-YR B	4TH-YR G	5TH-YR B	5TH-YR G	6TH-YR B	6TH-YR G	TOT. B	TOT. G
IE CONCEPTS	Existential concepts	65			1					1	1	1
ERNATIONAL NTS	The future	64	1			3	3	3	1	3	5	9
	Disasters	61	1		1	3	2	1		3	4	7
	Injustice, famine, rich-poor	63	1	5	2	7	8	12	8	13	19	37
	Conflicts, war	62	8	16	17	26	25	27	14	35	64	104
	Other	60		1		1	1	1		1	1	4
E PROCESSES	Religious life	56	6	1	2	6	1	3	1	5	10	15
	Death	54+55	19	29	27	47	15	37	15	37	76	150
	Identity, my own body, the psyche	48		2	2	2	1	2	2	3	5	9
	The beginning of everything	52										
	The universe	51										
	Destruction of the environment	47	3	8	4	11	11	11	10	8	28	38
	How the natural world functions	46					1	1	1		2	1
	Other	50	1		1			2		1	2	3
IETY	Equality, togetherness, security, harmony	59+49	3	3	2	7	3	5	4	7	12	22
	Injustice, rich-poor, unemployment	58	2	2	1	2	4	4	3	6	10	14
	Crime, anti-social behaviour, cruelty to animals, conflicts	45+57	2	1		6	4	8	1	9	7	24
	Accidents, disasters, illness	44	1	1		2		1	1	5	2	9
	Literature, film, TV, language, music	43+53	1		2	4	3	2		3	6	9
	Technology	42			1			1		1	1	2
	Guilt	41	1			1		2		1	1	4
	Other	40	1		2	4	1	5	2	8	6	17
ENDS/SCHOOL	Togetherness, happiness, security	39	3	11	4	11	5	22	1	18	13	62
	Loneliness, forsakenness	38		2	1	3	3	6	1	6	5	17
	Guilt	37							1		1	
	Injustice	36				1				1		2
	The future, being grown-up	20	2	5	3		3	7	3	5	11	17
	The future, plans for job, etc.	19			1	2	1	2	2	4	4	8
	Demands and achievements	35			6	1	3	8	2	12	11	21
	Life at school	34	2	7	15	7	21	14	11	14	49	42
	Boy/girl relationships	33			2		6	6	6	12	14	18
	Bullying, being teased	32	5	5	6	10	4	6	2	6	17	27
	Conflicts	31	1	3		1	4	4	1	5	6	13
	Illness, accidents	30		1		1						2
	Other	29										
FAMILY	Togetherness, happiness, security	28	10	25	9	23	16	13	8	21	43	82
	Loneliness, forsakenness	27	1	2	2	3	3	2	4	1	10	8
	Guilt	26				2	1				1	2
	Injustice	25								1		1
	Conflicts between, divorce	24	2	3	4	4		3	2	5	8	15
	Conflicts with	23	3	3	1	2	4	3		3	8	11
	Illness, accidents	22	1	2	1	3		6	1	5	3	16
	Other	21	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	3	5	9
ENTRED	Feelings											
	Happiness, security	18		1		1	3	2	2	7	5	11
	Loneliness, unrelated feelings	17					1	2			1	2
	Guilt	16	4		1	2	3	4		2	8	8
	Fear, sorrow	15		3		2	3		1	2	4	7
	Other	14								1		1
	The body											
	Functioning, pain, illness, accidents	13	5	4	4	3	2	11	3	7	14	25
	Other	12				1						1
	Activities											
	Sporting dreams	11	1		1						2	
	Sport	10	13	9	29	16	23	16	25	14	90	55
	Play & other activity	9	30	19	44	28	44	39	31	27	149	113
	Other	8	1	3	1	3	3	4	6		11	10
	Belongings											
	Being allowed to do something	7	1					1	2	3	3	4
	Being given a pet	6	4	22	3	31	6	24	1	18	14	95
	Being given things, presents	5	12	13	10	7	12	12	12	12	46	44
	Other	4	1	1	2				8	2	11	3
ER	Fine weather or bad	3	4	3		2	2	6	1		7	11
	Objects in the immediate surroundings	2	3	1	3	5	3	1		5	9	12
	Other answers	1	12	7	12	8	15	6	20	8	59	29
	Number of themes coded		173	225	232	319	278	359	221	380	904	1283
	Number of children		71	79	90	92	97	91	102	103	360	365

Studies in Education and Psychology

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